No. 55

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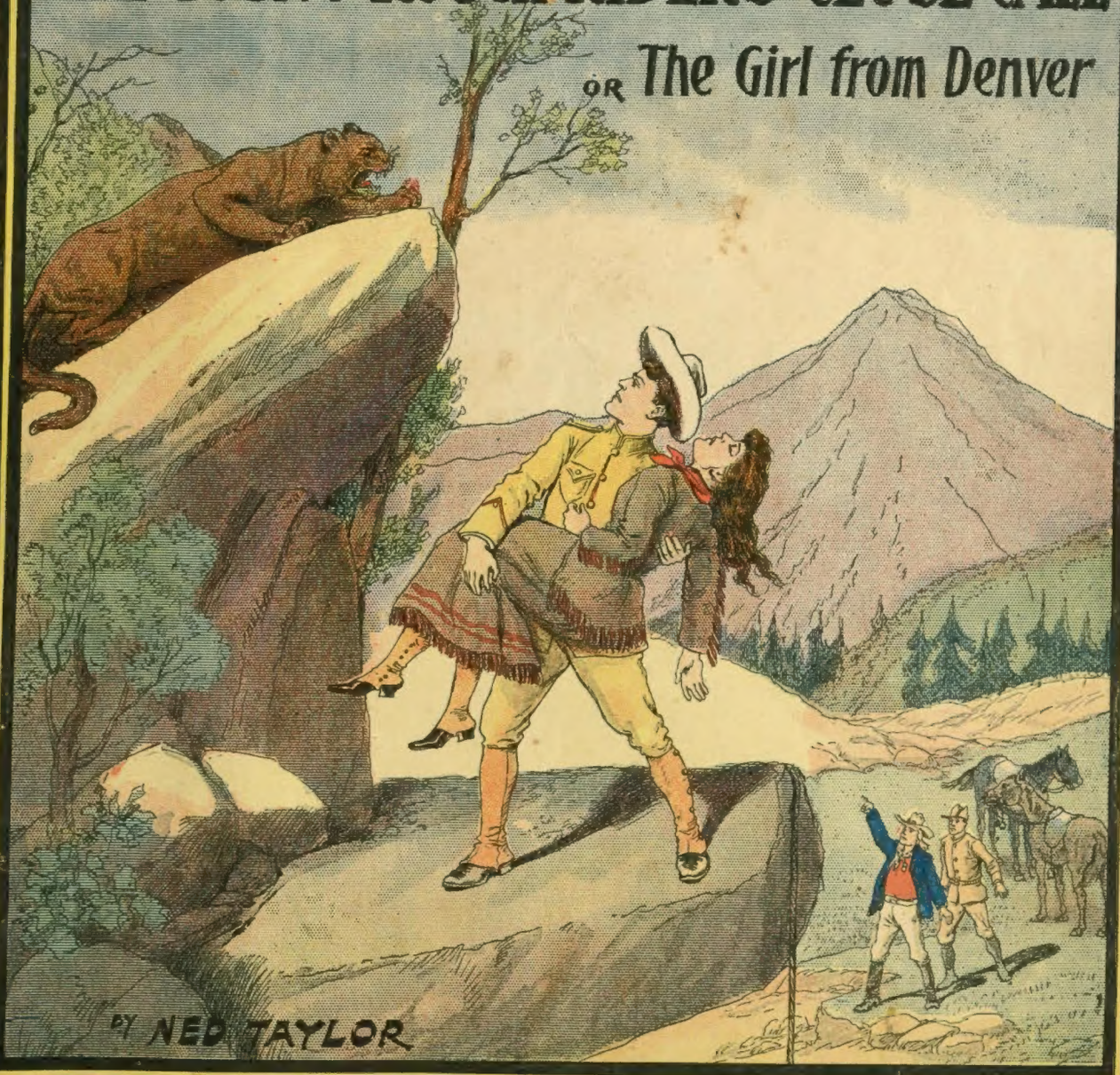
Young Rough Riders Weekly

MOST FASCINATING WESTERN STORIES

THE YOUNG ROUGH RIDER'S CLOSE CALL

OR The Girl from Denver



The young Rough Rider, with the form of the unconscious girl in his arms, turned and beheld a sight that nearly froze his blood.

The Young Rough Riders Weekly

Most Fascinating Western Stories

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The Young Rough Rider's Close Call;

OR,

THE GIRL FROM DENVER.

By NED TAYLOR.

CHAPTER I.

BEAUTY IN DISTRESS.

It was near the end of a beautiful day late in the fall of the year—the time of year in which persons residing in the Northern States of the Union were harvesting their crops and making preparations for the winter.

But the weather was still warm and mild in the region in which the incidents which are to be described in this story occurred.

In fact, had it not been for a gentle but steady breeze, the weather would have been uncomfortably hot this day in Southern Arizona.

Over the broad, rolling plain, dotted here and there by scrubby growths of small trees, three men were riding along at a moderate gait.

Two of the riders were hardly more than boys in age or looks, but the third, the smallest of the trio, was evidently close to forty years of age.

Perhaps the eyes of a stranger, in first beholding these three riders, would have rested longer upon the young man who was riding slightly in the lead than upon either of the other two.

The stranger would have been impressed with the face and figure of this youth. He would have seen that resolution was plainly written in every line of the boy's face. He would have known intuitively, by one glance at the boy's honest countenance and clear, honest eyes, that the youth was an individual who could be trusted.

In every line of the boy's carriage could be seen indications of great muscular power. He rode his broncho as if he had grown to the animal.

The lad was no other than Ted Strong, known throughout the West as "the young rough rider," leader of a company of young rough riders, whom he had organized soon after the Spanish-American War.

His companions were Ben Tremont and Bud Morgan, two members of his famous company.

Ben Tremont was an old college athlete, one of the strongest men in the whole United States. He was not only strong, but he had perfect control of his well-developed muscles. He knew how to use them to the best advantage, in every emergency.

The smallest of the three riders, Bud Morgan, although slight of build and considerably older than his two com-

panions, was wiry and strong. He had been on the plains and in the mountains for years, being for the most part occupied on various cattle ranges, until falling in with Ted Strong's organization.

Ted Strong, since his residence in the West, had gained a great reputation as a mine operator and cattle ranch manager. He was flooded almost continually with requests to visit ranches and mines in various parts of the country, for the purpose of making estimates, directing delicate work, and advising owners.

Accompanied by Ben and Bud, Ted was just heading for a certain part of the country to the north, for the purpose of looking into some ranching experiments being made by an old ranchman by the name of Aaron Miles, or "Paddy" Miles, as he was familiarly called.

The experiments were of a nature that had attracted considerable attention in that part of the country, and Ted Strong was making a long journey to examine the conditions and results.

The three rough riders were not riding fast, for they were expecting to spend the night in the village of Solomonville, about eight miles from where we first came across them. They knew they could easily make that distance by twilight, without hurrying.

As they were skirting the edge of a thick growth of small timber, Ted suddenly reined in his horse.

He inclined his head in a listening attitude.

He thought he had heard the sound of a muffled scream!

After waiting a moment he asked his companions: "Did either of you hear a sound, as if some one had started to call for help and was suddenly stopped?"

"I thort I heered some sech kind of a noise," replied Bud Morgan.

"So did I," said Ben Tremont, "and I thought it came from the grove or from the other side of it."

Without further comment the young rough rider rode up to the edge of the timber and threw his reins lightly over the protruding limb of a small tree.

His companions followed his example.

The three, Ted leading, quickly and noiselessly, parted the bushes and crept into the small forest.

They had advanced but a few rods, when their trained ears caught the sounds of rough voices.

A little nearer they crept, guided by the faint sounds, and suddenly they came to the edge of a small, cleared spot in the woods.

Gathered around the standing figure of a beautiful young woman, were four villainous-looking men.

One of these men was holding a white, legal-looking document in one hand, while the other hand was grasping the girl's wrist.

A look of horror was upon the beautiful face of the young woman.

The man who was holding her wrist was scowling, and his sinister eyes were gazing angrily at her.

"Well, will yer sign ther paper?"

"I am in your power, it seems, and I suppose that I must accede to your wishes, but what guarantee have I that you will then keep your promise to leave me alone hereafter?" replied the girl.

"Yer don't need no guarantee. We ain't got nothin' agin' yer. All we were told ter do were to make yer sign ther paper. If yer refused we were supposed ter kill yer and put yer body where it would be found!"

"And what good would it do you to kill me if I refused to sign the paper?" asked the girl.

"Yer can answer thet better'n I kin, I reckon. If yer died who'd get ther property?"

"I suppose it would go to the man who calls himself my guardian."

"Exactly," returned the villain.

"But there is one condition, that the fiend who has sent you on my trail must have forgotten," said the young woman.

"What kin thet be?" asked one of the other men.

"My brother," replied the girl.

"Well, we don't know nothin' about yer brother. All we know is thet we got our orders straight an' thet we air goin' ter get paid fer carryin' them out, so all we want yer to do is ter get busy an' decide if yer is goin' ter sign ther paper, or git ready ter play ther harp."

There was a period of silence, but at last the girl reached out her free hand and exclaimed:

"Give me the pen. If this act will end the persecutions to which I have been subjected, I will be almost willing to relinquish my claim upon the fortune which is mine by rights—mine, and my brother's."

A pen, which one of the men had been holding, and the legal document were placed in the girl's hands.

The villain who had been doing most of the talking released his hold upon the young woman's wrist.

As the girl spread the paper out upon the smooth surface of a rock, which came about waist high, and stooped over as if to sign it, the villains slightly changed their positions.

Ted Strong saw the man, who appeared to be the leader, whisper something in the ear of one of his companions.

The man who had been spoken to shifted his position until he was right behind the young girl.

As she placed the point of the pen to the place where the leader designated her name should be written, the man who was stationed behind her noiselessly drew a keen-bladed knife from his belt and placed it almost against the girl's side.

In an instant Ted saw what were the intentions of the villains.

After forcing the girl to sign some legal paper, against her will, they intended to kill her, so that her signature would not be contested!

CHAPTER II.

THE GIRL FROM DENVER.

The young rough rider, when he saw the knife in the hand of one of the men who were forcing the girl to sign the paper, knew that if he would save the girl's life he must act quickly.

The girl's pen could already be heard scratching the paper.

The villain who held the knife was watching her write, his evil face bent above her shoulder.

The hand holding the knife trembled with nervousness, but to the onlookers it seemed as if the blade trembled in eagerness to be sent into the flesh of the victim.

Ted shuddered, but quickly composed himself for the play he was about to make.

With a long flourish the girl finished her signature and sprang to her feet.

This unexpected move on her part probably saved her life, for it disconcerted the villain. He did not have time to make a thrust with his knife.

But he now sprang quickly toward the girl.

The young woman happened to glance around, and, as she saw the villain rushing toward her, knife in hand, she uttered a scream of terror and fell to the ground in a faint.

As the man stooped above her and was about to plunge the blade in the girl's bosom, the villains were started by a crackling in the fringe of underbrush and a stern order:

"Hold! Drop that knife!"

As the villains glanced around and saw the young rough rider standing near, two leveled revolvers in his hands, the man who held the knife uttered a curse and dropped the blade to the ground.

"Now you fellows clear out of here as fast as you can!"

That was Ted Strong's next order.

The men saw that the young stranger held "the drop" on them and that it would be useless to argue the case.

Ted's companions now stood beside him, and, as they, too, leveled their revolvers, the four men advanced quickly toward their horses, mounted and started to ride away.

"Don't any of you fellows attempt to draw a gun," admonished the young rough rider, "or you will be dropped in your tracks."

None of the villains offered a word in reply, but the one who had seemed to be the leader, just before he put spurs to his horse to ride away, suddenly wheeled the animal, and, with a quick swoop, snatched the paper which the girl had signed from where it had been left resting upon the rock.

"Drop that paper!" exclaimed Ted, as he saw what the villain had so deftly accomplished.

But only a gruff laugh was the answer. The villain had plunged into the forest and was out of range.

"What in sand hill did yer let 'em git away fer?" asked Bud Morgan.

"I do not know that I should have done so," replied Ted, "but the fact is, it all happened so suddenly, I did not stop to plan. My only object was to save the girl's life. Anyway, we have no time to be bothered with the men. I guess we have scared them sufficiently to keep them out of range for a while. Now let's see what we can do for the girl."

The girl had only swooned, and within a few minutes, with the aid of some cool water taken from a spring near by, she was brought back to consciousness.

She was greatly surprised when she opened her eyes to find the handsome face of a young man bending over her, instead of the evil countenance of the man who had been about to stab her.

"Where, where are the—the——"

"The men who were trying to make you sign that paper?" asked Ted, with a cordial smile playing about the corners of his mouth.

"Yes."

"We succeeded in scaring them away," replied the young rough rider.

"But one of them was about to kill me," said the girl.

"Well, he didn't succeed in even injuring you the least bit," replied Ted.

"You and your companions saved my life," continued the girl. "How can I ever show my gratitude?"

"Don't ever mention it again," said Ted, "and forget it yourself as soon as possible. I am glad that we happened to be in this vicinity just at the right time."

"Yer will allus find thet ther young rough rider is ready to assist beauty in distress," put in the irrepressible Bud Morgan.

The young woman blushed modestly at the reference to her comeliness.

"She certainly is a stunner," was Ben Tremont's comment to himself.

The girl really was pretty. She was not a decided blonde. Neither could she be called a brunette. Her eyes were the color of a woodland violet, large and lustrous. Her hair was wavy and, in color, medium brown. Rich, cherry-red lips bordered a small, well-shaped mouth, just parted enough to show a row of pearl-white, even teeth. A dimple was just evident in each of her finely molded cheeks.

The girl's complexion, while delicate as that of a hot-house rose, was slightly tanned, showing that she had

of late been considerably out of doors. She was the picture of perfect health.

She was dressed in a buckskin skirt which reached just to the tops of a pair of high, laced, riding shoes, small and comfortable, but made of tough, brown-finished leather.

Over a blue, woolen blouse-waist the girl wore a jacket of buckskin, embroidered with red and blue silk, and upon her head was a soft, felt sombrero, much like the one worn by the young rough rider, but having a narrower brim.

"I suppose you heard a part of the conversation between myself and the four ruffians?" asked the girl, addressing her remarks to Ted.

"Yes," was the reply.

"And I suppose you would like to know something of how I came to be in their power and why they wanted me to sign the paper?" was her next question.

"If you wish to tell us, we would be pleased to know, of course," was Ted's reply, "but do not tell us if you do not wish to do so. If you are in any kind of trouble and it is possible for us to help you, we will be glad to offer our services."

"Thank you. I will tell you at least a part of my story, for you certainly have a right to know it. Perhaps you can give me some good advice. I am in trouble, and I hardly know what course to pursue."

The girl was looking directly into the face of Ted Strong as she spoke. There seemed to be a sort of pleading look in her eyes and Ted pitied her. What her troubles were, he did not know, but he had determined that the girl had in some way a need for a strong champion. He would help her all in his power.

"Perhaps, before you start your story, it would be well to start toward town, for it is beginning to get dusk," said Ted, "but, pardon me, miss, is that the direction you wish to take?"

"I don't know," was the astonishing reply.

"Do you live anywhere near here?" asked Ted.

"No," replied the girl; "I am a stranger here, as I will explain when I tell you my story. I do not think I have a single acquaintance in this territory."

"I am Ted Strong," said the young rough rider, "and these gentlemen are my friends, Bud Morgan and Ben Tremont. We were on our way toward the north when we first heard noises among the trees, which caused us to halt. We expect to spend to-night at Solomonville, about seven miles from here. If you are a stranger in this region and will accompany us to that town, I think I can make arrangements for your being well entertained overnight. I have a friend in the town, whose wife is very motherly and hospitable. I think she will be glad to welcome you to her house."

"Thank you very, very much," said the girl. "I will go with you."

There was just the suspicion of moisture about her eyelashes.

The horse which had been ridden by the girl in coming to the place was found tied to a small tree a few rods from the cleared spot, and in a short time the four were on their way toward Solomonville.

Then the girl told her story, while the three rough riders rode slowly along by her side.

"I hope you will pardon me," began the girl, "if I do not tell you my name. There are circumstances that seem to make it imperative that I should not disclose my identity, but I will tell you that I was raised in Denver."

"Then we will call you 'the girl from Denver,'" replied Ted, "until such a time as you may see fit to let us know your real name."

The girl did not reply to Ted's suggestion, but went right on with her story, which, in brief, was as follows:

She said that her father had, at one time, been a wealthy mine owner. Her mother died when she was but a baby. Her father had died when she was thirteen years of age, and had left her to the care of his brother, who also lived in Denver. While the uncle had not been demonstrative in his love of the girl, he had provided for her liberally and had seen that she had had a good schooling, but, when the girl was sixteen, the uncle also died.

At the time of his death the uncle had been engaged in the real estate business in Denver. He had made considerable money and had invested to advantage much of the fortune of the girl, left her by her father. By the uncle's will, all his money was left to the girl, which, combined with what her father had left her, made a snug fortune.

But the uncle had a partner in the real estate business, a man by the name of Hiram Newman. The uncle seemed to have implicit faith in the honesty of Newman, for in his will he named the man as executor of his will and the guardian of his niece.

Newman was in reality a scoundrel at heart, and within a short time, the girl was convinced that the man was planning to defraud her of a part, or all, of her property.

His first act that seemed to, in a measure, prove her suspicions, came on her eighteenth birthday, when she went to his office and proposed, now that she was of age, that he come to a settlement with her.

Then he informed her that she was only seventeen.

There had been but one record of her birth available. That record was in her mother's handwriting in a big, family Bible.

The girl hastened home to get the Bible to prove to Newman that his statement was in error, but the Bible was not to be found in its accustomed place. A search of the house failed to bring it to light. She finally became convinced that the man had stolen it.

Unversed in business or legal methods, and having no

friend to whom she felt that she could go for advice, the girl was in a quandary. She knew not what steps to take in the matter.

"But in the town in which you were born there must be some record of your birth," said Ted Strong.

"I was born on a sailing vessel on the Pacific Ocean," replied the girl.

"Do you know the name of the captain of that vessel?" asked the young rough rider.

"No," replied the girl, "but I remember the name of the boat. It was the *Bonita*."

"Where from?" asked Ted.

"Where from? I don't understand you."

"I mean what port did the vessel sail from. Where did it belong?"

"Why, I think the vessel belonged in San Francisco," replied the girl from Denver.

"Well, then, if you could find the captain of that vessel, or the owners, and get access to the vessel's records —the log, as they call it—you would doubtless find a note of your birth at sea."

The girl's eyes lighted with sudden interest. She now saw what Ted was getting at. It was a point she had not thought of. Then she went on with her story.

After she had been unable to find the family Bible in which her birth had been recorded, she went to the real estate office again to see Newman. A stormy scene followed. The man still insisted that she was only seventeen; that he would not make any settlement with her for another year.

Then the girl threatened to see a lawyer about the matter and left the office with that intention. The man followed her into the hall, and, by force, dragged her back into the office.

Then he offered to settle with her if she would sign a receipt for the money he passed over to her.

The unsophisticated girl agreed to sign the receipt, but was wise enough not to sign the paper until the money had been placed in her hands.

For half an hour the man tried every argument of persuasion he could think of to get the girl to sign the paper. The girl, fatigued by the strain on her nerves and the excitement, finally fainted away.

She could remember of having just recovered sufficiently to swallow some kind of liquid, which was being held to her lips. Then she knew no more for hours.

When she came to her senses she found that her head was aching fearfully. She was in a dark room. She groped about until she found a door. The door was unlocked and opened into a hall, dimly lighted by a swinging, kerosene lamp.

The girl traversed the hall, and had her hand upon the knob of what was apparently the front door, when she heard voices in a room to the right.

Newman was talking to some one in that room and she was the subject of the conversation. She made out that the real estate man was making some kind of a bargain with some one to keep her a prisoner.

Then the girl opened wide the door, which proved to be unlocked, and rushed from the house.

The noise of the door being opened attracted Newman, who sprang into the hall just in time to see the girl going down the front steps. He sprang after her, but she ran as fast as she could toward a lighted thoroughfare, where she hailed a cab and succeeded in eluding her pursuer.

She gave an order to be driven directly to her home. Arriving there, she immediately got together all the money she had on hand, about three hundred dollars, left word with her housekeeper that she was going away on a visit, and then left the house. She was afraid that, unless she hid, her enemy would get her again in his power.

After leaving the house, instead of going to visit a lawyer, she conceived another plan, which she adopted.

The girl at one time had had a brother, three years older than herself. When five years of age the boy had been captured by a band of Apache Indians. It had been learned that the boy had not been killed, but had been adopted into the family of a chief by the name of Dog Eye.

For years the family had tried to locate the boy, but in vain. Now the girl decided to go to the Mescalero Apache Indian reservation in New Mexicio, where, it had been hinted, a son of Dog Eye was located, and endeavor to get track of her brother.

If she could find her brother, she was certain she could recognize him by a birthmark on his right shoulder—a red scar, the shape of an Egyptian cross.

It was then that she procured her buckskin clothing and a horse. She finally reached the Indian reservation, where she found not only the son, but Dog Eye himself, and learned from the old Indian that her brother had, fifteen years before, been given up to a white lady, who had taken the boy East.

The girl was disheartened and was about to go back to Denver, when she was approached by an old squaw, who had heard her conversation with Dog Eye.

This woman gave the girl information to the effect that she had seen the girl's brother a few months before, at Fort Grant, in Arizona.

The Indian woman thought that the boy would still be at the fort, as she said he was an enlisted man in the cavalry, then stationed there.

With renewed hope of finding her brother, the girl had started on the journey overland to Fort Grant. She had met with no mishaps until she had suddenly been held up by the four men on the plains. They had approached from the direction she had come, and they had

been riding hard. They had evidently been following her for several days.

She soon learned what they wanted. They wanted her to sign the receipt, as her guardian had tried to persuade her to do before she escaped from his power.

It was plain to her, she said, that the villains were in the employ of Newman, and they would undoubtedly have been successful in their desires, had not Ted Strong and his two companions happened to ride along, just at the right time.

When the girl's story was finished, the young rough rider said: "It is not far from Solomonville to Fort Grant, and we will see you safely to that place. I am quite well acquainted with several of the officers there, and, if your brother is at the fort, we can quickly find him. Maj. Homer Durgy is a particular friend of mine, and, as I sent him word that I was coming to this part of the country at this time, he will expect me to make him a visit, anyway."

The girl thanked the young rough rider gratefully and then the four spurred up their horses, so as to cover the few remaining miles to Solomonville before it became very dark.

CHAPTER III.

TED FINDS TROUBLE.

When the three young rough riders and the girl rode into the town of Solomonville, it was dark. The girl leaned forward and touched the arm of Ted Strong.

Glancing around, Ted saw a troubled look upon the young woman's face.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"I have just thought about it. The men got away with that paper."

"Yes."

"And I had signed it," the girl continued.

"I would not worry about that," replied Ted. "I had thought about it while you were telling your story. The paper would be worthless to your guardian, unless you should die. He would have to acknowledge that you are of age to make the receipt stand in law, and we were witnesses to the fact that you signed the paper against your will, anyway."

The girl was greatly relieved.

Ted led his party through several streets and into the residential part of the town, finally drawing rein before a neat, little cottage in the edge of the village.

"Here is where I hope to find refuge for you to-night," he said to the young lady.

Ted dismounted and approached the house. He knocked at the door and soon was confronting a pleasant-faced, middle-aged woman, who greeted him with a warm welcome.

She listened to his request and then came out to welcome the girl. She seemed delighted to accede to Ted's request, and, as the rough riders rode away, they felt confident that the young girl would be well entertained.

Ted and his two companions rode directly to a hotel, put up their horses and had supper. Ben and Bud Morgan, almost immediately after supper, retired to their room and to bed. Ted was not so tired and not in the least sleepy. He determined to take a walk about the town before turning in.

Strolling up the main street, he was attracted by the sounds of music. Approaching the building from where the music seemed to come, he soon found himself standing before the wide-open doors of a large dance hall.

The dance hall was connected with a barroom, and, as Ted looked in, he saw that the place was nearly filled to suffocation with men and women.

The men were mostly cowboys, whites and Mexicans, with a few loudly dressed gamblers and other men of doubtful character, while the women's faces proclaimed them to be creatures more or less depraved.

Drinks were being ordered and served rapidly, and Ted saw that already, in that early part of the night, some of the men were beginning to show the effects of the liquor and the hot, suffocating room.

They were beginning to talk loudly and boastingly.

The young rough rider knew that a fight would be in order soon, and he decided to stand in his present position for a time and see it.

He had not long to wait!

Suddenly, above the roar, came the sounds of two voices in dispute. Two of the cowboys were having an argument.

Then there came the sound of shots!

Both men had drawn their weapons and had commenced firing at each other.

Soon the cowboys, who were from several different ranches, all took a hand in the fight, joining different sides.

It promised to be a bloody affair.

Out, through the open doors and into the street, fled the women and most of the men.

Ted, engaged in looking at the battle being fought in the dance hall, did not notice two of the men who ran out of the hall.

But the two men saw the young rough rider.

They passed him and then stood a short distance back of him, their heads close together in conversation.

"That's ther feller, Bill, as held us up this afternoon and helped ther gal ter get away."

"Sure, he is, Jack. I never would forget that face."

"What'll we do, let him go, or watch fer a chance ter nail him? Seems like we ought ter get some sort of revenge, eh?"

"Yer bet we had. We'll watch him for a while, anyway, an' if we get a chance, why, we'll do him up."

Unaware that two villains were plotting against him a few rods away, the young rough rider stood for several minutes, watching the fight between the cowboys.

The fight was furious, but it did not last long.

Considerable damage was done to the furniture; the lights were all shot out, and three or four of the cowboys were slightly wounded. But, like nine-tenths of such fights in the West, no one was killed.

When the excitement seemed to be over, Ted moved on up the street.

It was a beautiful, moonlight night, and the young rough rider enjoyed his walk.

When he came to the end of the main street, he continued his stroll right out toward the country, scarcely realizing what he was doing. His mind was filled with thoughts concerning the troubles of the girl from Denver, whom himself and companions had that afternoon saved from death.

He turned the incidents, which she had related to him in her story, over and over in his mind.

Meanwhile, he had strolled along a little path leading to a small clump of trees. Several rods further along this path he came to a mineral spring.

The spring had been cleaned out, and a large pork barrel had been sunk, to form a curbing for the water.

The barrel was full, nearly to the brim. Ted was thirsty, and the clear water, sparkling in the moonlight, looked very refreshing and inviting.

Taking off his wide sombrero, Ted knelt beside the barrel and lowered his head with the intention of drinking with his lips from the surface of the water.

As he was just poised in a position to drink, two men noiselessly darted from behind the trees toward the kneeling form of the young rough rider!

As he began drinking they were upon him!

With a mighty push, they overbalanced the boy and Ted went plunging headfirst into the big barrel of water!

Then each of the villains secured one of the young rough rider's legs and held him head downward in the water!

It was evidently their intention to drown him!

CHAPTER IV.

THE GIRL RECAPTURED.

"Stop thet 'ere durn poundin'! What do yer want, anyway?"

It was Bud Morgan who spoke.

He had been awakened from a sound sleep in the middle of the night by a loud pounding on the door of his room at the hotel.

A voice answered: "Is this the room occupied by the young rough rider, Theodore Strong?"

"Yes, it is, if it's any of your business!" replied Bud.

The rough riders had engaged a room containing two beds. One of the beds was occupied by Morgan and Tremont, who had left the other for Ted when he should come in.

"It is very important that I should deliver a message to him as soon as possible."

Bud was now fully awake, as was Ben Tremont, also.

"Let him in," said Ben, who was sleeping next to the wall.

Bud got out of bed and opened the door.

A handsome young man, wearing a uniform which proclaimed that he was an enlisted man in the United States cavalry, entered.

"I have an important message for you, Mr. Strong," said the lad, addressing Morgan.

"Well, I ain't Ted Strong," replied Bud. "He's in the other bed."

Bud wondered why Ted did not speak. There had certainly been noise enough in the room to awaken the young rough rider. He approached the bed in which Ted was supposed to be sleeping.

Then Ben and the soldier heard Morgan utter an exclamation of surprise.

"Ted ain't in ther bed at all!" was his exclamation.

Ben jumped out of bed and stood by Bud's side.

Ted's bed had not been disarranged. He had not been in the room that night!

Ben glanced at his watch, and saw that it was nearly one o'clock in the morning.

"Ted must have met with some mishap," he said. "Let us dress as quickly as possible and look him up."

It did not take the two rough riders long to get into their clothes, and they started for the house of Ted's friends as soon as they had left the hotel. The young soldier accompanied them.

They had nearly reached the house, when they heard several screams in a woman's voice.

Then they heard the gruff voices of several men, cursing loudly, and the sharp report of a revolver.

The three men stopped for just an instant, and then rushed forward.

The sounds had come from in front of the residence for which they had started.

They had proceeded but a few rods, when they heard the rattle of horses' hoofs ahead of them and coming their way.

A second later four riders dashed by them at full speed. In the dim light the rough riders noticed that one of the riders held the form of a young woman in his arms, across the front of his saddle, and that while he guided his horse with one hand the other was placed over the girl's mouth.

"The girl from Denver!" exclaimed Ben Tremont.

"And ther four fellers we took her away from yesterday," said Bud Morgan.

"They have recaptured her," continued Tremont. "Where can the young rough rider be?"

The rough riders and the soldier were unmounted, and they knew it would be folly to try and pursue the four villains on foot.

They paused but a moment, until the sounds of the hoof beats died away in the distance, and then they proceeded on toward the house, where they hoped to find their young leader.

They were met at the door by the woman who had so graciously acceded to Ted's request to take the girl into her home for overnight.

They soon learned that the young rough rider had not been to the house since he had come with the girl, accompanied by his two companions. Then the woman told them what she knew about the capture of the girl.

"My husband did not come home last night. He went out to his ranch on important business. The girl and I were alone in the house, but I was not afraid, for I have often stayed alone here nights for weeks at a time.

"The girl occupied a room right next to mine. I was suddenly awakened half an hour ago by a slight noise in the hall, and got up to see what it was. I found the girl, fully dressed, walking down the hall toward the parlor. I spoke to her, but she did not answer. She went into the parlor, and I followed her.

"She was facing the door when I entered, and her eyes seemed to be directed right toward me. She was standing still, and I supposed she had heard me coming and had turned to meet me. I spoke to her again, and still she did not answer, but began walking right toward me.

"She seemed about to walk right into me, and I stepped aside. Then it suddenly occurred to me that she was walking in her sleep. I decided not to waken her, fearing serious results, but watched her, hoping that she might go back to her room and to bed.

"Instead, she opened the front door and started to walk out onto the porch. As she opened the door, I saw an unexpected spectacle out in the front yard.

"Four horsemen had ridden up close to the porch, and were dismounting. I jumped forward to pull the girl back in the room and to close and relock the door, but I was not quick enough. The men had seen her.

"Before I could set my lamp down and get to the door, one of the men had reached the girl, and had pulled her out of the house.

"The girl screamed, but the villains took her right along. As they mounted to ride away, one of the men turned and shot toward me. The bullet went right past my head and struck the door casing."

The woman pointed to a spot where a bullet had splintered the wood. She had had a narrow escape.

As soon as the woman had told her story the rough riders started directly back toward their hotel, the soldier boy still accompanying them.

Ben and Bud were in a quandary. They were certain that Ted would want them to follow the villains who had kidnaped the girl, but they did not relish starting away without knowing what had become of their young leader. They were by no means sure that he was not in serious trouble.

They finally decided to start in pursuit of the men who had recaptured the girl, however, and soon had their horses ready and were mounted.

It chanced that the rough riders ran across several men in the town who had seen the four men hurry out of the settlement. From them the young rough riders learned which direction to take.

The young soldier did not offer to accompany Ben and Bud. He said his orders were to deliver a message to Ted Strong, and he would wait until the young rough rider turned up.

The direction taken by Ben and Bud was directly north. They spurred their horses, and were soon at the edge of town, and headed straight out across the shadowy plain.

CHAPTER V.

AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE.

The young rough rider found himself in a dangerous position when he was so suddenly attacked and tipped headfirst into the large barrel of water.

His mouth was open when he took the plunge, and he nearly strangled. He had taken no breath preparatory to a plunge, and a few seconds under water would have resulted fatally.

The barrel was deep, and the villains had forced him into it as far as possible. Only the young rough rider's boots appeared above the surface.

In trying to raise himself, Ted managed to kick one foot free, and, as he did so, his spur, more by accident than intention, hit one of his adversaries on the cheek, cutting it nearly to the bone.

With an exclamation of pain, the villain let go of Ted's other foot, and the young rough rider began to scramble out of his awkward position.

The villains returned immediately to the attack, but by this time Ted had succeeded in getting one hand over the top edge of the barrel, and his face was out of the water, which had been greatly reduced in the barrel by Ted's immersion.

Ted's head was forced under the water again, but he managed to take a long breath before that was accomplished, and he knew that he was good for at least a full minute.

He rested a moment, allowing his muscles to relax.

He did this to fool the men who had attacked him, and he succeeded in his purpose.

Thinking that he was exhausted, and was about to give in, they slightly relaxed their grip on him.

Suddenly Ted renewed his efforts. With a great effort, he succeeded in pulling himself out of the barrel.

The men tightened their grips, but too late. With a mighty swing, Ted tore himself loose from their holds, and, turning suddenly around, he planted his fist full in the face of one of them. The man was knocked flat on his back.

At that instant the other villain drew a revolver and fired it almost in Ted's face as the young rough rider turned to fight his remaining foe.

Ted fell full length upon the ground.

It was several hours before the form of the young rough rider finally moved, and it was a long while after that before Ted sat up, and gazed wonderingly at his surroundings.

His head ached fearfully, and his mind seemed clouded.

It was several minutes before he could recollect how he came to be where he was. Then he remembered the struggle he had had with the two men near the spring.

He felt the top of his head, and found a ridge across his scalp—a swelling about as wide and about as high as his forefinger. The ridge was several inches long.

Then he comprehended the state of affairs.

When the villain had shot at such close range, the bullet had skimmed along the young rough rider's scalp, rendering him instantly unconscious.

The villains had supposed that he had been killed outright, and had left his body where it fell.

When Ted had it all figured out, he arose to his feet and started back toward the town.

He arrived at the hotel within a few minutes after Ben Tremont and Bud Morgan had left to pursue the four men who had abducted the girl.

As he went into the hotel office, Ted confronted the young soldier, who had said that he had a message for the young rough rider. The soldier suspected at once that Ted was the young man for whom he was looking, and advanced toward him as soon as he saw him.

"You are Mr. Ted Strong, are you not?"

"Yes," replied Ted, eying the lad.

"I have a message for you—a very important one," said the young cavalryman; "but first I have something else to tell you, regarding the whereabouts of your two companions."

"You mean Bud Morgan and Ben Tremont?" asked Ted.

"I did not learn their names, but I suppose they are the men who just left the town."

Then the soldier informed Ted of the abduction of the girl, and the start that Bud and Ben had made a few moments before in pursuit of the men who had recaptured her.

"You are from Fort Grant?" asked Ted, suddenly.

"Yes," was the reply.

"My men started north in pursuit of the villains?" the young rough rider then asked.

"Yes," replied the soldier, quickly seeing the point in Ted's mind: "and I will have to go back to the fort at once. I can tell you about the message while we are riding along."

"Good," replied Ted, starting for the hotel stable to get his horse.

"Now, what is the message you have for me?" asked Ted.

The question was asked when the two were well started on the trail leading north from Solomonville.

"I was sent by Maj. Durgy," commenced the young soldier, "to look for you, and urge you to hurry on to the fort. The major seemed to think that you were not far away, and he told me to stop at Solomonville and inquire for you there."

"Why did the major wish me to hurry to the fort?" asked Ted.

The lad's reply was startling.

"He hopes to get your assistance in running down a gang of men who, the night before last, held up a stage in which the army paymaster was riding from Fort Grant to Fort Apache!"

"Was the paymaster robbed?"

"Yes; and his escort of six armed and mounted soldiers were found shot down in cold blood. The paymaster was killed, and the stage driver was seriously injured. The driver was a long time in getting back to the fort, and it was nearly dark yesterday before the news of the tragedy reached Maj. Durgy. Of course, a detail of soldiers was immediately sent to the scene, with instructions to scour the country, and are now engaged in the work. The major fears they will not succeed, however, and sent me for you, with orders not to spare my horse until I found you."

"Have you any idea how much money was secured by the villains?" asked Ted.

"Not over ten thousand dollars," was the reply. "Fort Apache was the only post on this paymaster's list yet unpaid."

"Where did the hold-up take place?" was the next question.

"In Miller's Gulch, about twenty miles from Fort Grant."

"Have you any idea who the highwaymen are? Has any such band been operating in this region of late?"

"No to both questions," answered the soldier. "We have heard of no hold-ups anywhere about here since the present outfit has been stationed at Fort Grant. The soldiers change forts every two years, you know, and the present cavalry command has been stationed there about eighteen months."

Ted and his companion had been riding along at a fast gait while the foregoing conversation had taken place, and they now approached a place on the trail where it entered a deep ravine.

"This is the same trail which leads to Fort Grant, is it not?" asked Ted.

"Yes," replied the soldier. "This ravine leads down into the mountain range and into a wide gulch, almost a valley. The trail to the fort is right up the gulch. It is perfectly plain, and there are no branches that I know of leading out of the gulch."

"Then, if the men who abducted the girl came this way, they could not leave the gulch until they arrived nearly at the fort?" was Ted's next question.

"That is right, I think," was the answer.

"By the way," said Ted, a few moments later, "I have not asked your name."

"My name is Frank Makley," the lad replied.

It was now approaching daylight, and as the two riders rode down into the gulch Frank had spoken about they spurred their horses to increased speed.

An hour later, just as the sun was rising in the east, Ted suddenly pointed ahead, and gave vent to his surprise by a low whistle.

Up the trail, a quarter of a mile away, he had discovered Bud Morgan and Ben Tremont, standing on a little knoll, holding their horses by the bridle reins.

The two young rough riders seemed to be gazing up at the rocky wall of the gulch to the right, but Ted and Frank could not see the object of their interest. Intervening crags of rocks prevented.

"Jumpin' lizards! but I'm durn glad you've showed up!" exclaimed Bud Morgan, a few moments later, as he saw Ted approaching.

"What were you two looking at?" asked Ted.

"We just sighted the four villains and the girl!" responded Ben, as the young rough rider dismounted.

"Where are they?" asked Ted.

"They just went around that point of rock!" was the astonishing answer of Ben Tremont.

As he spoke, Ben pointed to a narrow ledge, high up the face of the perpendicular wall. The ledge was like a shelf upon the mountain side.

It started from what seemed to be a crevice, or split in the rock, continued along for several rods, and then descended at a moderate slope to the bottom of the mountain.

The shelf was so narrow that, while it looked possible for a man to ride up the ledge from the bottom of the gulch, it would appear to be a very dangerous undertaking.

But Ben and Bud said that they had arrived at the spot just in time to see the four villains, in single file, completing the ascent on horseback.

They said the desperadoes had just ridden out of sight, around a certain prominent rock, into the crevice or split in the mountain.

The shelf where the men had entered the crevice was fully two hundred feet up the face of the mountain.

Directly in front of the crevice, and leading out from the ledge, was a long point of rock, much the shape of a blacksmith's anvil at its pointed end.

This rock reached out over the valley.

Above the ledge was another, but much smaller, shelf in the face of the mountain.

"You are sure the four men who abducted the girl rode into that crack in the mountain?" Ted asked his companion rough riders.

"We sartain didn't make no mistake," returned Bud, convincingly.

"Then it's my intention to follow them," said Ted.

"On horseback?" asked Ben.

"No—on foot," was the answer.

"Hadn't we better go along with yer?" asked Bud Morgan.

"I would rather you would stay down here, and keep your guns ready to fire at any moment," responded Ted.

A few moments later he was climbing the shelf.

As Ted reached the shelf, the men below suddenly saw a person come out of the crack in the mountain and walk on the narrow point of rock, nearly to the end of it!

This person was the girl from Denver, and she was blindfolded!

Her hands were tied behind her back!

She was helpless, and it was certain she did not know where she was going.

A loud, warning cry was uttered by Bud Morgan.

"Stand still, young woman!" he yelled.

Hearing his voice, the girl paused for an instant, right at the edge of the point of rock.

Just one little step, and she would plunge into the valley below, where death upon the rocks would surely be her fate!

Hearing Bud's shout, Ted hurried along the shelf, and soon came in sight of the girl. He saw her predicament.

Hearing his footsteps, and probably thinking he was one of her enemies, the girl suddenly screamed, and started to take a step forward.

In a second she had slipped from the rock and had started to fall toward the rocks far below!

CHAPTER VI.

TED'S CLOSE CALL.

When starting to climb to perilous positions among mountain peaks and ledges, Ted Strong had always found it a good plan to carry his lariat with him.

He had done so in this instance.

When he had first noted the perilous position of the blindfolded girl he had sorted out the coils of his lariat and had widened the noose, holding it in his hands for instant use.

The girl had hardly started to take that dangerous step,

when the noose end of the lariat was making a circle of the young rough rider's head.

As the girl fell from the shelf, the long noose, carrying with it the loose coils, sped far out over the shelf in the direction of the falling form of the girl.

At the same moment that he let loose the noose, Ted sprang forward and out upon the jutting shelf of rock from which the girl had just fallen.

He did this to better withstand the shock, should he succeeed in noosing her, and also to prevent her body being suddenly jerked against the rocky side of the mountain.

As the lariat flew toward the falling form of the girl, the spectators below held their breaths in suspense.

It seemed hardly possible that Ted could succeed in his purpose.

It would seem almost miraculous should he succeed in noosing the falling body.

But the friends of the young rough rider uttered sighs of relief a moment later, and then from the valley below arose three great shouts of joy.

The noose had circled the body of the girl, and had been drawn taut about her waist.

As her fall was checked there was a tremendous strain upon Ted's arms, but the young rough rider had braced himself for the ordeal, and managed to hold tightly to the rope.

His arms seemed to have been loosened at the shoulder joints by the awful strain, and before he tried to pull the girl up beside him he tied his end of the lariat around the point of rock for a moment's rest for his arms.

Then he stooped and pulled the girl upward, hand over hand.

She was slightly built, and not heavy, and he soon had her upon the shelf again.

Then Ted discovered that the girl was unconscious. She had fainted dead away!

The young rough rider cut the cords that bound the young woman's hands, and removed the dirty cotton handkerchief with which she had been blindfolded.

Then he loosened the noose of the lariat, and threw it over the edge of the rocks.

Ted waited a moment, to see if the girl would be apt to return to consciousness immediately, but, seeing no signs to indicate that she would open her eyes for some time, he picked her up in his arms, with the intention of carrying her to a safer place upon the ridge.

The young rough rider, with the form of the unconscious girl in his arms, turned toward the face of the mountain.

Just then he heard his companions in the valley below give great shouts of alarm!

Ted glanced toward the mountain, and beheld a sight that nearly froze the blood in his veins!

A mountain lion was crouched on the narrow shelf above his head!

With his belly hugging the rocks, its luminous eyes upon the young rough rider and the girl, its tail lashing the rocks behind it, the big creature was about to spring!

In all his adventures, the young rough rider had never been closer to death than at that moment.

Speaking of the adventure later, Ted said that it seemed to him that every incident of his lifetime seemed to pass in review in his mind. Trifling incidents of his childhood, which had been long forgotten, came vividly before him.

But in all this chaos of thoughts a plan of escape came to him.

It was a plan that embraced a slim chance—a chance so meager that he had little hope of its being good.

Cautiously he lowered his body until he had assumed a sitting posture upon the point of rock, with the girl's still unconscious form across his lap.

Then he edged along to the very point of the shelf, and, reaching behind him, began drawing up the lariat, which had been left dangling in the air below the rock.

With as little motion as possible, he lifted the form of the girl, and tied the lariat around both her body and his own.

During these few moments the lion had still been crouching and ready to spring at Ted's first motion toward leaving the rocky shelf.

When the lariat had been securely tied, the young rough rider, with the girl tied securely to him, suddenly slipped over the point of the rock into mid air!

Just as the two bodies left the rock and swung in the air below it, the lion made its spring!

The beast did not take a powerful jump, as Ted had hoped. It did not go on over the shelf of rock and plunge into the valley below.

The lion landed on the point of rock—on the very spot from which the young rough rider and the girl had slipped.

The huge beast sniffed at the rope of the lariat where it looped over the point of rock, and then it squatted down, and, thrusting its head over the edge of the shelf, glared down upon its intended victims.

It reached out with its cruel paw in an endeavor to reach the bodies dangling just beneath it in mid air. But it could not reach them by several feet.

While thus swinging in the air, Ted managed to get his revolver from his belt. He decided to take a shot at the beast.

The lion was right above him, and he aimed his bullet at the creature's left eye.

Ted pulled the trigger, and saw at once that his shot had taken effect. He had not killed the lion, however, but had wounded the animal.

With a savage roar, the beast backed up, and in a second more had lost its balance and its hind quarters were hanging over the opposite side of the shelf!

With its front paws the lion was scrambling to get a hold in the rock to draw its body back, and might have succeeded had not Ted, watching his chance, suddenly shot up his hand and grabbed the tail of the animal.

Ted gave the tail a sharp pull, and the beast went tumbling down to the jagged rocks below.

As the lion fell, Ted uttered a great sigh of relief, and he was about to shout some instructions to his friends below.

But just at that moment he glanced up, and the words died on his lips.

Coming from the split in the mountain was one of the villains who had abducted the girl from Denver!

In his hand the man held a gleaming knife!

His intention was all too obvious. He intended to cut the strands of the lariat by which Ted and the girl were suspended from the rocky shelf!

CHAPTER VII

INTO THE CRACK IN THE MOUNTAIN.

At the moment that big Ben Tremont first saw the mountain lion on the shelf above Ted and the girl he started at once for the rocky ridge that led to the position of the young rough rider.

He had gained the shelf just as the mountain lion had sprung onto the point of rock, and had raised the hand which held his revolver to fire, but Ted had fired first, and a second later Ben had seen the lion falling into the valley below.

Then Ben started forward to help his young leader out of his predicament—to help him again reach the shelf with the girl.

At that moment the villain with the knife appeared.

The man could not see Ben, as there was an intervening rock, but as the desperado set foot on the shelf from which the young rough rider was suspended Ben was right behind him.

As the villain stooped to cut the rope, Ben's strong, muscular arms reached out and grasped the man by the collar of his shirt.

Ben lifted the man off his feet as if he had been a small boy, gave the body a swing, and threw the villain clear back against the rocks.

Then Ben started to where the desperado was lying upon the rocks, with the intention of binding him so that he would be obliged to stay quiet.

But the man was too quick for Ben. He jumped up suddenly and ran into the crack in the mountain.

Ben did not pursue at once, but gave his attention to helping Ted.

In this matter Ben's great strength was useful. With a hard strain, Ben succeeded in lifting the combined weights of the young rough rider and the girl several feet, until Ted's hands reached the rock.

Ted thus supporting himself, it was an easy matter for Ben to draw the still unconscious form of the girl to the rock, and then assist Ted to a place of safety.

Ted would have immediately penetrated the crack in the rocks, through which the villain had retreated, had he not felt obliged to first see to the resuscitation of the girl.

With the aid of a flask of brandy, which big Ben brought from his pocket, Ted at last succeeded in bringing the young woman to a state of consciousness.

But it was some time before she was sufficiently recovered to be able to tell of her experiences in the hands of the villains.

While Ted had been working over the girl, Ben Tremont had descended into the valley again, and was assisting Bud Morgan and Frank Makley to bring the horses up the ridge to the high, rocky shelf.

They arrived at the place where Ted was working over the girl just before she fully returned to consciousness.

When it seemed that the young woman was able to speak, Ted questioned her as to what had happened since she had fallen for the second time into the hands of the four ruffians.

The girl from Denver was able to tell very little.

She said the first she knew of her being captured was when she suddenly awakened in the night and found herself being held securely across the saddle of a fast-moving horse. She had glanced up, and saw the face of the villain who held her, and then quickly fainted away.

How long she was unconscious she did not know, but when she finally awakened she found herself in a sort of pocket in the rocks, seemingly connected with the outside world by a narrow slit in the mountain.

The villains were seated near her, and were talking about being pursued. One of the men was urging the other three to kill her immediately in cold blood.

Her hands were then tied behind her back.

Suddenly the men put their heads close together, and talked for several minutes in low voices.

Then one of them approached her with a dirty handkerchief in his hands. With this he blindfolded her, bade her to rise to her feet, and, when she had done so, conducted her through the narrow slit of the mountain, and told her to make her escape. He said that they had decided to give her one chance for her life. If she could escape through the mountains thus tied and blindfolded, well and good.

As a matter of fact, the villains knew that, unassisted, the girl could not escape certain death from falling into the valley, many, many feet below. It was really a plan on their part to murder the girl.

As soon as the girl from Denver had finished her story, Ted gave the order to proceed into the mountain through the crack.

On the surface the slit was not more than wide enough to admit a horse and rider, but several feet within the

mountain the crack widened out so that two riders might have easily ridden abreast.

Ted and his companions had proceeded but a few rods into the mountain when they came to an open space, several rods wide by at least one hundred yards in length.

This was the pocket that the girl had referred to where she had first recovered consciousness after having been abducted by the four villains.

The desperadoes were not in sight now, but at the further end of the pocket the girl from Denver was certain evidences would be found of their having camped there.

Riding down the length of the pocket, it was found that several men had recently been in the retreat. The grass was trodden down and among other trivial things scattered about the young rough rider noticed a copy of a Denver newspaper, considerably wrinkled, but evidently all intact.

Ted picked this paper up, with the intention of reading it later, and placed it inside an inner pocket.

The rough riders spent very little time in exploring the pocket. Ted soon found an opening in the rocks leading out of the retreat, and gave orders to his companions to follow him on after the villains.

The girl was carried on the back of Bud Morgan's horse, seated directly back of the old "cow puncher's" saddle.

The passage taken by Ted soon ran into a cave in the side of the mountain.

Riding forward, they found that the cave penetrated far into the rocky wall, and made several sharp turns.

They rode slowly along for ten minutes, when Ted, who was in the lead, informed his companions that there was a ray of light ahead.

A short time later the party found themselves riding out of the mountain into a wide valley on the opposite side from the canyon they had been following.

It was a beautiful valley into which Ted and his companions found themselves gazing.

Nearly a mile wide, and bounded on either side by picturesque mountains, whose dark, rocky walls rose almost perpendicular, it was one of the prettiest valleys, from a scenic point, that Ted or his friends had ever seen in the West.

It was a fertile valley, too. The grass grew luxuriantly, and the green leaves of the trees, which grew in clusters all along the valley, provided a pleasing contrast to the brown rocks of the mountain sides.

Down through the valley, nearly in the center of it, flowed a small, winding creek, like a long, silver ribbon.

The company under Ted's leadership halted for a moment as they rode out of the mountain cave, to feast their eyes on the beauties of nature so lavishly displayed before them.

Ted strained his eyes in each direction, up and down the valley, for a sight of the four men whom they were pursuing, but nowhere could he see a trace of them.

Just as they were about to proceed by a gently descending trail down to the valley, Ted suddenly raised his hand for silence.

Then he bent his head in a listening attitude.

He had heard a sound resembling the hoof beats of many rapidly approaching horses.

The sound became plainer and plainer, and a minute later he knew that he had not been mistaken.

At least two dozen or more riders were coming down the valley from the north at full speed.

Ted gave a quick order, and his party was soon concealed from view from the valley behind a short ridge of rocks.

The horsemen soon came in sight. There were about twenty of them.

They were riding hard, and their horses were covered with foam.

From a place of concealment Ted saw that it was a very mixed company of men who were riding by.

They were dressed in all sorts of styles—some as cowboys and others in plain clothes. All were well mounted, and each man seemed to be fully armed.

The leader of the party was mounted on a coal-black, magnificently built horse.

He had black hair, and a heavy black mustache. An unusually large nose and overhanging eyebrows gave his face a hawkish expression.

He rode as if grown to his saddle, showing that he was an accomplished reinsman.

As the swift riders passed the point where Ted and his party were concealed, the young rough rider came out of his hiding place and stepped to a point where he could watch the departure of the company for a long distance up the valley.

As the riders approached a clump of trees, a quarter of a mile away, Ted saw them suddenly draw their reins and halt.

Four men had ridden out from the clump of trees directly in the path being followed by the large company.

They were the four men Ted and his party had been following—the men who had tried twice to bring about the death of the girl from Denver.

It was evident that these men were acquainted and on favorable terms with the company of men who had just passed, for Ted could see them shaking hands all around.

The halt was but for a minute or two. Then the company of horsemen took up their ride again, the four men falling in behind the leader on the black horse and riding away with the others.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CAVALRY.

For a moment Ted stood still and watched the retreating horsemen.

His first impulse was to follow them, but, thinking of

the message that had been sent to him from Maj. Durgy, requesting his help in running down the men who had murdered and robbed the army paymaster and his military escort, Ted changed his mind.

It seemed to the young rough rider that he could more profitably spend his time in assisting the major than in running after the four villains who had tried to kill the girl.

Ted by no means intended to neglect the girl. He had determined to see her through, help her find her brother, if possible, and regain the property which Hiram Newman was trying to procure for himself.

But the matter of murdering and robbing the paymaster's outfit was of a serious nature, and would permit of no delay.

Turning to the soldier boy, Ted asked: "Can we reach the fort by following this valley, or must we go back through the mountain to the gulch?"

"It would be a matter of about three miles more travel to follow the valley," was the reply.

"Then down the valley we will go," said Ted, "for I would rather ride three miles further than to go back down that narrow ledge."

The four men and the girl from Denver were soon in the valley, and riding at a good rate of speed down the trail in the opposite direction from which the company of men had ridden a short time before.

They had proceeded several miles, when they heard another sound of approaching hoofs.

From around a bend in the valley they knew that another company of horsemen were coming.

There was no place where they could get under cover quickly, and they knew they would be discovered.

Ted called a halt, however, and told his companions to be sure their weapons were handy.

A moment more, however, and Ted saw that there would be no necessity of using the guns.

From around the bend in the valley came a dozen cavalry boys, well mounted.

In command of this squad was an officer—a major—and, as the soldiers drew nearer, Ted saw that the officer was no other than his old friend, Maj. Durgy.

The officer saw and recognized Ted as quickly as he himself had been recognized, and he quickly gave his men the command to halt.

"Well, this is what I call good luck!" exclaimed the major, advancing to grasp Ted's hand.

"I thought you were out looking for the gang of men who looted the paymaster," said Ted.

"So I am," returned the major. "I see Fearless Frank succeeded in finding you."

"Fearless Frank?"

"Yes. Oh, I see; the lad introduced himself as Makley? We always call him 'Fearless' at the post, on account of his reckless daring."

Ted then told the major of the adventures himself and companions had undergone, which had caused his delay in getting to the fort.

Then he asked: "You are certain you are on the trail of the desperadoes?"

"I am certain that they rode up this valley not many hours ago," replied the major.

Ted and his rough rider companions looked at each other with significant glances.

"Then my companions and myself saw the men not over an hour ago," said the young rider to the major. Then he told Durgy of the company of riders they had seen going up the valley.

"It must be the same party!" exclaimed Durgy. "Let us lose no time in pursuing them."

"Just a minute," put in the young rough rider. "I have a young woman on my hands here, who is in trouble. I am going to help her, and it will hardly do to take her on a trip of this kind. Will you allow me an escort from among your men to take her to a place of safety, to wait until I can attend to her affairs?"

"Gladly," said Maj. Durgy, and immediately called two of his men forward, and directed them to take their orders from Ted.

"I see one of your men is leading an extra horse," said Ted.

"Yes; it is one of the horses ridden by a lad who belonged to the paymaster's escort. We picked the animal up a while ago."

"May I borrow the horse for the young woman?" asked Ted.

The officer assented.

Then Ted gave the young men who had been detailed instructions to conduct the girl back to Solomonville, and to the house of the lady who had taken the girl into her home the previous day. Ted wrote a short note to the woman in explanation.

The girl seemed loath to go back, but there seemed no other course for her to pursue, and she knew that the young rough rider would, as soon as he was free to act, straighten out her affairs to the best of his ability.

These arrangements having been made, the pursuit of the outlaws was continued, Ted, Bud and Ben accompanying Maj. Durgy's command, while the two detailed men started to escort the young woman to Solomonville.

The soldiers knew that the hold-up men had a long start, but they hoped, with the assistance of Ted Strong, who was famous for his ability to follow a trail, to eventually overhaul the desperadoes.

They were not to overtake the men they were hunting that day, however, although they rode fast and traveled many miles.

At nightfall they had long since left the valley, and were entering the heart of the mountains, through a wide

canyon into which they had followed the trail of the road agents.

They traveled until a late hour—until the nature of the ground was such that further riding after dark was impossible. This made it imperative for them to rest an hour or so, until the moon should rise to such a height that its beams came into the canyon.

This enforced interval of rest was occupied in getting a meal and in watering the horses and giving the animals an opportunity to eat grass from a small, fertile knoll.

As soon as he had looked to the comfort of his horse, Ted sat down near the fire to rest until the meal had been prepared.

As he sat there, he suddenly remembered the newspaper he had picked up from where it had evidently been dropped by one of the four men who had kidnaped the girl.

He took it from his pocket, smoothed the creases out, unfolded it, and began to read.

At first he had instinctively turned to the page devoted to mining news, but, finding little of interest to him there, he began turning the pages and reading the headings.

As his eyes roamed over one page they caught a line in black, heavy type, which caught his attention.

He read the following lines of the article with great interest. It was then announced that supper was ready, but the young rough rider did not hear.

He was reading the news story through for the second time!

CHAPTER IX.

TED IS PERPLEXED.

The news item that the young rough rider had found in the Denver paper seemed to perplex him. After reading it through several times, he dropped the paper and gazed for a long time thoughtfully into the fire. And then he picked up the paper and read the article again.

The article was worded as follows:

YOUNG DENVER GIRL MISSING!

Steals Money from Benefactor and Disappears.

THOUGHT TO HAVE BEEN INSANE.

Hiram Newman is Searching For Clews to Locate Gladys Decker—Girl Lived on His Bounty—Acted Strangely of Late.

The chief of police of this city was yesterday informed of the strange disappearance of Miss Gladys Decker. Hiram Newman, the well-known real estate dealer, was the informant. The girl was living at No. —— —— Street, in a house formerly occupied by her uncle, Forest Decker, now deceased. The uncle had been a partner with Mr. Newman and had been considered well off financially. He left all of his property to the girl. Mr. Newman says no will was made, but the property was left in trust with him.

Three days ago the girl became of age and Newman intended to make a settlement with her. Forest Decker was not as well off as was generally believed, and, when outstanding obligations had been met, in the shape of notes for large sums, most of which were indorsed by Mr. Newman, little remained for the girl.

Mr. Newman felt sorry for the girl, he says, and did not tell her how little her legacy amounted to. He even went so far as to pay several of the notes out of his own pocket so that the girl would retain the house in which she lived. Since the uncle's death, Mr. Newman says, he has paid all her household expenses out of his own pocket.

The news of her financial condition seemed to greatly affect the girl, and it was noted the next day that she acted very strangely. Newman says that for several years he had suspected that her mind was not right, and he believes that the shock drove her insane.

The girl was a frequent visitor at Newman's office, and one day he had showed her how to open his safe. He says she is the only living person besides himself who knew the combination.

Yesterday morning Newman opened his safe as usual and made the startling discovery that over forty thousand dollars in money and negotiable paper had been stolen. About fifteen thousand dollars was in bills of large denomination.

He reported the matter to the police at once, and within an hour it was discovered that the girl had disappeared. A search was at once started for her, but so far no clew has been found concerning her whereabouts.

One peculiar circumstance that makes Mr. Newman almost certain that the young woman's mind is affected, is the fact that during the morning of the day before her disappearance she was in his office for several hours and continually talked about her brother.

As a matter of fact, it is not known that the girl ever had a brother. She claimed her brother was stolen by the Indians when he was a baby.

This was the principal part of the news story which so interested the young rough rider, but there was quite a little more of it.

The story went on to describe the girl, and one paragraph was devoted to telling what an estimable citizen Hiram Newman had always proved himself to be.

Then on the same page of the paper was a picture, purporting to be a likeness of the girl herself.

By the picture and by the description of her given in the paper, Ted knew at once that the girl, who was the subject of the news article, was no other than the young woman he had twice saved from death at the hands of the four ruffians.

He had believed the girl's story as she had told it to him.

On reading the news item a doubt as to the veracity of her tale entered his mind.

Might it not really be true that she was insane—that [illegible] much of the story she had told him?

[illegible] pictured Newman as a most disreputable man.

[illegible] true that he was dishonest—that he was a veritable fiend. He might be trying to rob her.

Then, again, he might be the soul of honor.

The newspaper pictured him as a perfect citizen.

Then the girl had said that her uncle left a will. The news item said that no will had been made.

Yet, the girl might be right and the paper wrong. The girl might have seen the will. Perhaps the will had never been probated. The document might have been stolen and destroyed or hidden by Newman.

Long and earnestly Ted pondered over the matter.

He was trying to determine if it was his duty to inform the Denver police authorities of the whereabouts of the girl or to proceed with a thorough investigation on his own hook first.

At last he decided to let the matter rest until he had a chance to see the girl, question her and find out whether she really had a brother among the enlisted men at Fort Grant.

Ted resolved to tell none of his companions about the story he had read in the three-weeks-old Denver newspaper until he had really learned the truth of the matter.

After eating a substantial meal, Ted took advantage of the opportunity of taking an hour's nap.

He was finally awakened by Fearless Frank, and, on rising, found that the gulch or canyon was well lighted by the moon, which was now directly overhead.

"Excuse me for awakening you," said Frank, "but I have been out on a scout all by my lonesome and have made a discovery which I knew you would wish to know about."

"I am much obliged to you for waking me up," was Ted's reply, "for it is now time we were on the move. But what did you find out?"

"The men we are hunting are in camp about three miles up the canyon," was Frank's reply.

Ted lost no time in finding the major. The men were aroused; the horses were saddled, and, within a short time, the whole company was heading up the canyon.

CHAPTER X.

A LUCKY CIRCUMSTANCE.

After riding for a couple of miles, a halt was called and then Ted held a short consultation with Maj. Durgy.

"Frank has been telling me," said Ted, "that the men are in camp not over a mile from here, and that they are in a position well adapted for defense. It seems to me that it would be folly to try and make a direct attack upon them. We might overcome them, and, we might be repulsed. In either event, such an attack would mean a loss of life. I propose that Frank and myself go ahead to reconnoiter, before we make a decided move."

"I think your suggestion is a good one," returned the major, "but we should arrange for some sort of a signal to be used by you in case you get into trouble and need our assistance."

"If you hear me fire my rifle three times in quick succession, you will know I need help," said Ted.

Ted then asked Frank to guide him to the camp of the villains, and the young man readily consented.

Leaving their horses behind, the two young men started on foot up the canyon.

They traveled as much as possible in the shadows of the rocks so as to avoid being seen by any of the desperadoes, who may have been posted as sentinels on outpost duty.

But they ran across no living beings as they proceeded along the hard, rocky trail.

At last Frank halted for a moment, as if to get his bearings, and then turned slightly to the left and climbed to a position on the top of a high bowlder. Ted followed.

Arriving at the top of the big rock, Ted saw, a short distance up the gulch, the glimmer of a camp fire.

"The camp of the road agents," he said.

"Yes," returned Frank.

Not a sign of life was visible about the camp, except for the moving of some shadowy forms beyond the fire, which the young rough rider knew to be some of the horses belonging to the villains' outfit.

Around the fire, wrapped in blankets and lying motionless on the ground, Ted could see the forms of the sleeping outlaws.

But Ted knew that somewhere about the camp were sentinels on the watch for the approach of enemies.

He knew that the villains would not be so foolish as to go to sleep, entirely unprotected.

Ted resolved to first ascertain the whereabouts of the sentinels if possible.

The young rough rider spoke a few low words to Frank, bidding the young soldier to remain on the rock until he should return, and then Ted stepped down to the ground, on the side of the bowlder nearest to the outlaw camp.

He had resolved on a bold move. He intended to creep as closely to the camp as possible and determine the positions of the men on guard.

For a rod or two Ted hugged the high wall of rock and kept in its shadows, but then it became necessary to advance across the canyon in order to approach the camp.

At this place there was a rank growth of low bushes, and, by lying almost flat on the ground, the young rough rider hoped to creep forward undiscovered.

Slowly Ted made his way through the bushes until he found himself right at the edge of the outlaw camp.

Then for several minutes he listened.

Not a sound was heard except the deep breathings and snores of the sleeping villains.

It was dark now, for the moon had gone behind a cloud. Ted ventured to raise his head above the growth of bushes.

The moment that his head appeared, there came a quick shot from a rifle and a bullet whizzed dangerously near the head of the young rough rider!

He had been discovered by one of the hidden sentinels!

But Ted was given little time for speculation on the matter, for he had hardly ducked his head and squirmed along to another position, to puzzle the man who had fired the shot, when he heard a struggle in the direction where he had left Fearless Frank.

He was about to jump quickly to his feet and run to the young soldier's assistance, when there were heard startled exclamations from the direction of the outlaws' camp.

The desperadoes were beginning to awaken!

As Ted sprang to his feet, four of the villains saw him and sprang toward him.

Ted made a gallant fight, but the odds were too strong against him. He managed to knock down three of his adversaries, but others soon came to their assistance.

Within a few moments, the young rough rider had been overpowered and found himself bound hand and foot.

It had all happened so quickly that Ted found it impossible to fire his rifle, thus giving Maj. Durgy knowledge of his predicament.

Ted hoped that the young soldier had escaped and would be able to carry the news of his capture back to the major, but this hope was shattered a few minutes later when Fearless Frank was brought near the fire, bound and helpless like himself.

Frank explained later that he had suddenly been tackled from the rear by two men. There were three in the party, and the third had fired upon Ted at the same moment that the others had grappled with Frank.

The sentinels had been stationed quite a distance up the valley. When they saw Ted and Frank approach, they had hidden, allowing the soldier and the young rough rider to approach the camp.

Then the three villains closed in behind them and followed them.

It was really a clever move and resulted, as we have seen, in the capture of both the young men.

Ted realized that, for at least once in his life, he had made a bad move, but he did not give up hope of in some way getting his liberty.

He had been in just as bad and worse scrapes before and had escaped serious injury.

The effect of the capture of the young men was what Ted expected as soon as he found himself in their power.

The outlaws knew that the soldiers could not be far away and they lost no time in getting ready to fly up the gulch.

They were in such a hurry to be on their way that they did not stop to make away with Ted and his companion.

The two prisoners were tied on one horse and soon the company was under way.

Ted figured that Major Durgy, with his men, would wait at least an hour longer for the return of himself and Frank before proceeding.

This would give the villains a good start.

The outlaws seemed to be thoroughly familiar with the ground, for, although the moon had ceased to throw any light into the canyon, they proceeded at a fast gait.

There were numerous gulches branching into the mountains on both sides of the canyon.

Several of these branches were passed by the outlaws, but finally, just before daybreak, the leader of the company turned into a branch gulch to the right and the other horsemen followed.

This gulch was several rods in width at the entrance, but it began to narrow gradually as the company proceeded into it.

Through its center flowed a narrow mountain stream.

The gulch finally narrowed down to just the width of the stream and suddenly, as the party rounded a bend, the gulch seemed to come to an end altogether.

Right before them was a waterfall!

At first Ted was inclined to be secretly elated. He surmised that the outlaws had made a mistake—that they had entered the wrong gulch. This, he reflected, would be a point in favor of the soldiers. Major Durgy and his men would gain lost time.

The waterfall was not a high one. The water fell into the gulch from the rocks, perhaps thirty feet above.

The stream, as it fell, was not over six feet in width.

There seemed to be no possible way to ride around it.

A moment only did the leader of the outlaws halt, however. Then he put the spurs to his horse and dashed forward.

Right toward the waterfall he rode!

Ducking his head as he reached the water, the leader spurred his horse again and then disappeared.

Horse and rider had passed directly through the falling sheet of water. They were now out of sight.

One by one the rest of the party followed suit until all but one outlaw—the one who was leading the horse ridden by the two prisoners—remained.

Then this rider also started toward the fall, pulling upon the prisoners' mount to follow.

In a moment Ted and Frank found themselves right at the waterfall.

They ducked their heads, anticipating getting a thorough drenching.

But at that minute something entirely unexpected happened.

The horse they were riding appeared afraid of the water. The animal planted its front hoofs firmly against the rocks in the bed of the little stream and balked.

It was a strong animal, and, as the lead strap was pulled taut by its leader it did not move.

Then the young men heard the outlaw who had been leading the horse curse and swear for a moment and then ask some of his companions to help him pull the animal through the falling sheet of water.

Several men must now have taken hold of the lead strap, for there was a sudden strain.

The horse was actually pulled forward with its feet ploughing the rocks against which they were braced.

It looked for a moment as if the outlaws would succeed in dragging the animal through the waterfall.

Then Ted Strong's heart gave a bound.

He had heard a loud snap! Something had broken loose!

There came another stout tug at the lead strap and the obstinate horse almost fell back upon its haunches!

The lead strap had been tied to the bit rings of the riding bridle. The throat strap of the bridle had snapped in two.

The bridle slipped off the horse's head and dropped in the water.

The horse was free!

The animal showed its delight and spirit by backing out of the creek and up onto solid ground. Then it threw its head into the air, shook its mane and whinnied.

The animal was headed down the gulch toward the canyon now.

The young rough rider gave the animal a dig with his spurs and the horse kicked up its heels and started off at a breakneck gallop.

Just as the horse started off Ted heard a splash in the creek, and glancing back saw that the leader of the outlaw band and several of his followers, dripping wet, had come back through the waterfall and were about to start in pursuit of the runaway horse and the two young prisoners.

CHAPTER XI.

A WELL-DRESSED STRANGER.

As Ted and Frank took their wild, dangerous ride down the uneven gulch on the runaway horse, they realized that, while they stood a good chance to get away from their enemies, they were still in a dangerous situation.

They were tied securely together and to the horse. There was little danger of falling off.

But should the animal make a stumble—a misstep upon the uneven, treacherous ground, while going at this terrific gait—the boys knew it would be all up with them.

They did not even have the use of their arms.

They had been deprived of all their weapons.

Ted soon found that the animal had not been broken to obey by motions of the body, as are most cowboys' horses. The horse was practically a free-lance in its movements.

On reaching the canyon Ted hoped to be able to turn the animal down the canyon in the direction he was certain Maj. Durgy and his men were coming by this time.

As they left the gulch the young rough rider and the soldier shifted their weights as much as possible to the left and leaned far over to induce the animal to take the desired direction, but in vain.

The horse evidently had an objective point of its own, for as it dashed out of the gulch it threw its nose in the air, whinnied softly, and then started up the canyon in the opposite direction from which the outlaws had approached early in the morning.

The outlaws did not pursue the runaway animal and its helpless riders into the canyon, or, at least, after leaving the gulch, for Ted and his companion heard nor saw no more of their foes.

On and on up the canyon galloped the horse, seeming to realize its freedom and bound to make the most of it.

In vain Ted, who was riding in front, tried to check the horse's speed, now that he was sure they were not being pursued.

The animal refused to mind any spoken word and its riders soon began to realize the seriousness of their situation.

The motion of the horse prevented either of the boys from making any efforts to free their hands, which they might have accomplished had they been able to have made the horse stand still.

They had ridden at least six or seven miles up the canyon, when the horse began to slacken its pace from very weariness.

Then it was that Ted dug his spurs into the animal and forced it to further exertion.

He wanted to thoroughly tire out the animal now.

He kept the horse on a gallop for a couple of miles further, when the horse showed such evident signs of

being worn out that even the spurs would not send it off a walk.

Just at this point, when Ted was still trying to urge the beast forward, the animal turned into a path leading to the right into a small ravine. The ravine led through a narrow ledge of mountains to a canyon much deeper, but considerably narrower, than the one they had left.

Where the ravine met the canyon there was a precipitous descent of nearly fifty feet. The ravine seemed to have been sliced off at that point as by a sharp knife.

A turn in the ravine hid this precipice from the eyes of the boys until they were right upon it.

Just as the horse rounded the curve Ted dug his spurs once more into the animal's flanks.

At that moment Ted saw his mistake. The horse was right on the brink of the precipice!

As Ted dug his spurs into the animal's flank the horse sprang forward, and then tried to stop on the very edge of the steep wall.

But its spring had thrown the animal too far forward. It could not check its progress. Its front feet left the solid rock and slipped into the chasm.

At that instant the solid rock on which the animal's hind feet were planted seemed to suddenly give away.

The animal's hind feet slipped into the hole thus made, saving the horse from going over the precipice.

The headlong drop to certain death for the two riders was thus prevented, but the horse was balanced on the very verge of the precipice, its front feet and head waving in the air.

The animal struggled to free itself, but its struggles were useless. The two boys were still upon its back and helplessly bound.

They had little hope of help from their friends, and their only hope of geting free seemed to be by their own exertions.

The horse had dropped down until the feet of both boys were now resting upon the rocky ground, but their feet were tied by ropes reaching under the belly of the horse.

As soon as the horse had ceased to struggle and there seemed no immediate danger of now falling over the precipice, the boys began making efforts to sever their bonds, but the ropes had been tied by experienced hands and they knew that it would certainly be a long and painful task, even if they did at last succeed in getting free.

They went about the matter systematically, however.

Ted was sitting in front and Frank was behind, facing Ted's back. With a great effort, Frank managed to slip back nearly a foot and Ted drew his hands, which were tied behind him, as far up toward his shoulders as possible.

After several futile efforts Frank managed to reach the rope, which bound the young rough rider's hands, with his teeth.

Then began a tedious and painful trial for both. Frank was endeavoring to gnaw the rope in two.

It was a small rope, but was composed of many strands.

Strand after strand Frank laboriously chewed upon until finally, after nearly five hours' work, he succeeded in loosening the young rough rider's hands. The rest seemed easy, still it was nearly an hour later that the last cords binding Frank's feet were loosened and the two boys were off from the horse and standing upon solid ground.

An examination showed that from the face of the precipice, back to beyond where the horse had stood, there was a small cavelike fissure in the rocks. The horse's hind feet had happened to rest upon a weak spot and the rock ceiling of the fissure had caved in, thus letting the animal's hind quarters down and saving the lives of Ted and the soldier.

It was at first thought that the hind legs of the animal had been broken, but an examination proved that the animal was practically uninjured except for the loss of some hair and skin.

By the aid of the ropes, which had been used to bind them to the horse, the boys succeeded in helping the horse to regain a position on solid ground. Then, with the same ropes, the boys fashioned a bridle for the horse, with a knotted bit, Indian fashion.

It was now long past noon and Ted proposed that they start immediately back down the gulch in order to look up Maj. Durgy and his soldiers, for the purpose of making an immediate attack upon the outlaws, in what Ted suspected was their stronghold, somewhere beyond the waterfall.

The boys, leading the horse, had proceeded back along the ravine and were just entering the gulch when they saw a man, dressed in city clothes, fedora hat, lightweight, checked coat, pants and vest, white shirt, collars and cuffs. The man was riding leisurely along on a black horse.

The man, in his citified clothes, seemed so out of place in that part of the mountainous country that Ted, involuntarily, gave an exclamation of surprise.

Ted and Frank were right upon the stranger, and the well-dressed individual heard Ted's exclamation and stopped the horse he was riding.

As he saw the young rough rider and his companion, a look of fear spread over the man's countenance. He dropped his reins and held his hands high in the air.

"Don't shoot! I surrender! Take my money!" The man uttered these exclamations with trembling tones.

Ted, amazed, could not keep back the smile that forced itself to his lips. The spectacle of the man, scared out of all reason, with his hands high in the air, was too much. Fearless Frank burst out into a roar of laughter.

The laughter did not seem to allay the fears of the fastidious stranger, however. He gazed with troubled countenance from one to the other of the young men, as if to determine which one of them was to be his executioner.

"Pardon us for laughing," Ted finally managed to say, "but we are not hold-up men. You need not fear for your life or for your property."

The man looked surprised, and seemed loath to believe Ted's statement. He turned Ted's words over in his mind, seemingly, before answering, but he finally lowered his hands and remarked:

"I thought you were two of Jim Fisher's gang!"

"Jim Fisher's gang?" repeated Ted Strong.

The man hesitated about answering.

He picked up his reins as if about to ride on, but the young rough rider took his horse by the bit.

"Who are you?" asked Ted.

"Is that all you wish to know, young man?" asked the stranger.

"It will do for a start," replied Ted. The young rough rider was unprepared for the startling answer of the well-dressed stranger:

"My name is Hiram Newman!"

CHAPTER XII.

TED'S CUNNING TACTICS.

That the young rough rider was surprised when he heard the well-dressed stranger quietly say that his name was Hiram Newman was certainly true.

But Ted was not the boy to let his emotions be evident. His quick mind instantly conceived a reason that would perhaps account for the presence of the Denver real estate man in that vicinity.

He determined at once to pump the stranger for all he was worth, to match his wits against those of the city man and probe to the bottom, if possible, the matter of the difference between Newman and the girl who had claimed the man was trying to rob her of her property.

Ted had studied over the matter carefully. He had come to the conclusion that the news story in the Denver paper was a fabrication, instigated by the real estate dealer. Ted was inclined to believe the story of the young woman. Now there seemed to be a chance to get conclusive evidence if he proceeded right.

But he knew that he would have to use great tact in conversing with Newman. That the man was shrewd, at least in some ways, Ted knew.

It seemed as if a second had not elapsed between the time the man had announced his name and the moment when the young rough rider dropped his hand from the bit of Newman's horse and advanced with outstretched hand toward the man from Denver, a pleasing smile upon his face.

"You must excuse me, Mr. Newman, for giving you this trouble. I did not know who you were, and when you mentioned the name of Jim Fisher my suspicions were aroused that you were a government official of some sort. Jim and his lads can't be too careful, you know."

"Why—then—then you do belong to Fisher's gang?" asked the Denver man.

"Of course we didn't dare to admit it until we knew who you really were," half apologized Ted.

"Can you tell me where I can find Jim?" asked Newman.

"Sure," was Ted's reply, "but are you sure he is expecting you to-day?"

"Well, he told me to come as soon as possible. I started three days ago and he sent me all the directions. I have them in my pocket—or rather in my saddlebag. Something about a waterfall, turn to the right, et cetera."

"That's right," replied Ted, "but you were not wise to come out alone, do you think?"

"I did feel a little leary, but my business was important, as you may know, and I dared not trust anyone to accompany me."

Right here Ted felt that he was making great progress, but he wanted to get down to the subject of the girl, and decided to make a bold effort to introduce her

into the conversation at the risk of putting Newman on his guard. In an inconsequential manner Ted said:

"By the way, Mr. Newman, you cannot guess what an awful job we had landing the girl. She escaped from us twice before we finally secured her for good."

"And now?" asked Newman.

"Oh, we have her safe enough now," replied Ted.

"She is still living?" asked the real estate man, watching Ted's face searchingly, as if to read whether the boy would tell the truth or not.

"To tell the truth about it," Ted answered boldly, "the girl is still living."

Newman scowled.

"And is that the way Jim Fisher keeps a promise?" he asked.

"That is between you and Fisher," replied Ted, "but, as it happens, Fisher just now has nothing to do with the girl."

"What?" almost screamed the man from Denver.

"It is as true as gospel," replied Ted, "for Fisher is no longer the boss of the band."

"Who is, then?" returned Newman.

"I am," was Ted's startling answer.

"Since when?"

"Yesterday!"

"And the girl is in your power?"

"Yes."

There was an interval of silence. Newman descended from his horse and stood, stroking the animal's mane. He was in deep thought. Finally he said:

"Do you intend to carry out the bargain I made with Fisher?"

"That is a question I cannot answer," replied the young rough rider, "for the reason that Fisher is grouchy about losing his leadership of the gang and won't cough up what his agreement with you was. I am only holding the girl until I can come to a definite understanding with you personally. If you make the right offer, well and good; if not, why——" Here Ted shrugged his shoulders, then continued: "The girl is mighty pretty, and, with a comfortable fortune in her own right, she would not make a bad wife for a fellow about my size."

The real estate man was visibly troubled. He seemed to have run up against a proposition that he had not heretofore considered—one that he was not prepared to meet.

Ted was inwardly filled with delight. He knew now that he had the man on the verge of committing himself.

There was now no doubt in Ted's mind that Hiram Newman was a thorough scoundrel. He waited for the man to speak.

Newman left the side of his horse and walked forward and back along the rocky path a dozen times before he finally looked up and said he would like to talk to the young rough rider privately.

This was not to Ted's liking. He wanted Fearless Frank to hear all that Newman had to say. He thought perhaps the lad's testimony against the villain might be needed later.

"Anything you wish to say to me," said Ted, "you need not fear to say before this young man. He is my partner and is square all the way through."

Newman eyed Frank and seemed reticent about talking, but finally concluded to say openly what he wished to say in private.

"You think the girl has a fortune by right?"

"If not, why should you wish her put out of the way?" asked Ted.

"But I have everything now arranged so that she could never get a cent, even should she appear in Denver alive and well. She would be immediately arrested for theft, should the police authorities of Denver find her. Her uncle's will has never been seen by anyone but herself and I. Even should the will be found, which is not at all likely, she could draw nothing, for I have receipts to show that I have paid out more on outstanding notes of her uncle's and father's than their properties together amounted to."

"But, supposing the signatures of those notes were proved to be forgeries?"

"Jim Fisher has confided in you!"

The sentence was uttered quickly and sharply, as if the man had suddenly suspected that Ted was not what he pretended to be.

Instantly there came a light in the young rough rider's brain as he heard the words uttered. He remembered of the conviction a year or two previous to this time of a man by the name of James Fisher. The man had been arrested for forgery and was sentenced for a long term of years to a State penitentiary of the Middle West. He was said to be one of the most expert forgers ever convicted. Might it not be possible that this man was the present leader of the outlaws whom Maj. Durgy was trying to corral? If so, might it not have been this James Fisher who had signed the notes, which Newman

claimed to have paid out of property left by the deceased uncle of Gladys Decker?

Ted took a chance that such was the case and the expression on the face of the Denver man, when the young rough rider had answered his last remark, told Ted he had guessed the truth.

"Certainly Fisher confided in me. I forced him to it. He told me the notes were all forgeries—that he himself forged the names!"

Newman's face turned ghostly white, but a moment later he suddenly brightened up and exclaimed:

"But that secret is safe with you. You are an outlaw. You dare not squeal on me!"

Ted smiled. "Why should I squeal?" he asked. "Is it any of my business whether the notes were genuine or forgeries? You intend to offer me good money for my quick-disappearance act, with the young woman as the principal character."

"But how am I to have proof that you will carry out your agreement?" asked Newman.

"You may accompany me to where the girl is now, and see your wishes carried out with your own eyes," replied Ted.

Newman's eyes dilated when he heard Ted's suggestion and his whole form trembled as with the ague.

Wicked and heartless as he was he did not wish to see the girl murdered.

At last he said: "As soon as you have presented proofs to me that Gladys Decker is no longer in the land of the living I will pay into your hands the sum of ten thousand dollars in gold!"

The man had been looking down at the ground as he spoke. Now he looked up, and, as he met the eyes of the young rough rider, he saw that a great change had come over Ted's face. The young man's eyes seemed to be looking him through and through.

Ted had accomplished his purpose. He was now certain that the story the girl had told him was true. He suspected why the girl had not told her name, having learned that Newman had accused her of theft and started the theory concerning her sanity.

The paper in which Ted had read the news story was several weeks old. It was not improbable that the girl had seen the article.

Now that he had the man practically in his power, Ted proposed to make as clean a job as possible of it.

He no longer had need to pretend that he was an outlaw. The truth would be better now, he decided.

Advancing to Newman, Ted placed his hand upon the collar of the man's coat. There was a dangerous gleam in the eyes of the young rough rider.

Newman was alarmed. He knew that something startling was about to take place, but he could not guess what it was.

The look upon Ted's face was not assuring and Newman knew that the young man could not be dealt with lightly. Ted's first words did not tend to compose his fears.

"Newman, you are a scoundrel!" Ted began. "If I should treat you as you deserve I would take you to the nearest town, expose your infamy and allow a posse of men to hang you to the nearest tree."

Newman's face blanched with fear, but he was not given any time to make a reply.

"I have deceived you," Ted continued, "but my deception had a purpose. That purpose has been accomplished. I am not an outlaw. The girl whose fortune you have tried to steal, whose life you have tried to take will yet come into her own. You are at the end of your rope. The efforts of your paid hirelings to make away with Gladys Decker have been happily made for nothing. The girl is not in their power. She is alive and well. She is under my protection and no stone will remain unturned until you have had your just deserts."

While Ted had thus been talking a crafty look had come into the eyes of the Denver scoundrel. Now he asked:

"But, my dear young man, how do you expect to be able to prove all these assertions?"

"If the girl's brother is living we will soon find him. The man who forged those notes, James Fisher, will soon be in our power."

Ted had loosened his hold upon the man's collar and had stepped back several paces. Frank stood several yards away holding the horse which had carried the two boys to this part of the canyon.

Suddenly Newman must have noticed that the two boys were unarmed, for his deportment suddenly changed.

As Ted finished speaking the real estate man suddenly reached toward his hip pockets.

Ted saw the move and started to rush forward, but too late. The villain had drawn his weapons and had the two boys covered with a revolver in each hand!

"Now, my fresh young upstart," said Newman, "I am inclined to believe that you and I had better come to an understanding in this matter."

Ted had wisely halted when he saw the extended revolvers.

While it was not probable that the city-bred man was an expert with the weapons, the range was close and it would be exceedingly dangerous to make a move to draw his fire.

Frank was further away from Newman, and the young fellow determined to make a sudden dash, draw the man's fire and give Ted an opoprtunity to close in on the villain.

Like a flash, Frank jumped behind his horse.

Newman saw the act, and, in his excitement, fired both weapons at once. He was rattled, however, and the revolver, which had been extended toward Ted, tilted up and its leaden missile flew skyward.

A groan from Frank, however, told that the other bullet had found its mark.

At the moment the revolvers were fired the young rough rider ducked and sprang forward. He caught the Denver man around his legs, just below the knees, and sent him to the ground, square on his back.

In a jiffy he had Newman under control, and, while holding his man down, he turned to see how seriously Frank had been injured.

"I think my arm is broken," said the young soldier, in answer to Ted's query.

But Frank proved to be game, for with his free arm and hand he succeeded in procuring some cords from those used in the construction of the Indian makeshift bridle. These he handed to Ted, who soon rendered Newman helpless.

As Ted started to regain his feet, after securely tying the man from Denver, he noticed that a packet of papers had fallen from an inner pocket of the man's coat.

He stooped to pick the bundle from the ground, and, as he turned it over, he gave a low whistle of astonishment.

Written plainly upon the outside of the packet were these words: 'Will of Forest Decker and Papers Pertaining to His Estate and that of His Niece, Gladys Decker."

Ted slipped the packet into his pocket and then turned to examine Frank's wound.

Just then the boys heard the sounds of approaching hoof beats.

A moment later they saw Maj. Durgy and his soldier boys coming up the canyon.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LOST BROTHER.

After Ted had greeted the major and his friends, Bud Morgan and Ben Tremont, he continued his examination of Frank's injury.

He found that the bullet had made an ugly, but not necessarily serious wound. The arm was not broken, as Frank had imagined.

The bullet had entered the fleshy part of the arm, close to the shoulder, and Ted found that he would have to cut off the sleeve of the boy's shirt in order to properly dress the wounded member.

While Ted was thus engaged he told the new arrivals of the experiences Frank and himself had had, and, in a measure, gave the major a satisfactory account of how they had come to bind the man from Denver.

Then Ben Tremont told Ted of the movements made by the soldiers, after they had discovered that the young rough rider and the soldier had disappeared and that the outlaws had taken flight.

They had started forward toward where the outlaw camp was supposed to be located, just about an hour after the villains had decamped with the two prisoners.

Their progress had necessarily been slower in the dark than that of the outlaws, and they had been puzzled when they came to the entrances of branching gulches. At every branch a halt had been called, while Bud Morgan and Ben Tremont had investigated to look for tracks.

Bud and Ben had penetrated the small gulch leading to the waterfall, but did not suspect that the trail extended beyond the sheet of falling water.

Thus the party had slowly advanced up the gulch, until they had come across the young rough rider and his companion.

By the time Ben had made things clear, Ted had succeeded in baring Frank's arm and was beginning to show his surgical skill by probing for the bullet.

Ted soon found that the soldier lad's shoulder would also have to be bared in order to give him room enough to work.

With a knife borrowed from Bud Morgan Ted made a slash in Frank's blue army shirt along the shoulder blade. As he removed the knife Ted glanced at the lad's

bare shoulder and uttered an exclamation of astonishment, that brought Ben and Bud closer to the spot.

Ted said nothing, but his index finger pointed to Frank's shoulder.

There, upon the smooth, white skin, they saw a strange scar.

It was red and was shaped like an Egyptian cross!

"The mark which the girl from Denver described!" exclaimed Ben.

Ted put his fingers to his lips to command silence. He did not wish to excite Frank until his arm had been attended to, but his caution had not been noticed by Ben.

"What is the matter?" asked Frank.

"We were only remarking upon the strange scar on your shoulder," replied Ted. "Is it a birthmark?"

"I think so," Frank replied, "for it has been there as long as I can remember."

The subject was thus easily dismissed for the present and Ted went on with his surgical work, but when he had removed the bullet and had scientifically dressed the wounded arm, Ted thought that it would be safe to question the young man.

"Frank, I would like to ask you a few personal questions if you do not mind," was Ted's opening remark.

"Certainly, fire away," returned the young soldier, but his eyes expressed his curiosity.

"What do you know of your past life?"

Then Frank did, indeed, appear surprised. But he tried to answer Ted's questions.

Gradually Ted learned that Frank was, beyond a question of a doubt, the brother of Gladys Decker.

Briefly, the particulars that Ted learned of Frank's life were as follows:

The earliest recollections that the lad had were of an Indian camp life. How he had come to be among the Indians he had never known, but he knew that one day a white woman discovered him in the lodge of the chief who had adopted him. The woman had had a long private talk with the chief and the next day had taken Frank away with her. He had been at first very loath to leave the Indian camp, for the red men had always been kind to him, but the new life in the East, in Philadelphia, soon weaned him of any desire to return.

The woman had named him Frank and had given him her own surname, which was Makley. Mrs. Makley, who was a widow and well-to-do, was kind to her adopted son. She gave him a good common-school education and had intended to send him to college, but, just after he had graduated from the public school, the woman died. Bad investments had consumed most of her wealth and the motherless boy found himself left to his own resources.

Perhaps the dim remembrance of his wild life in the West caused Frank to enter the army, but, at any rate, a few months later found him enlisted in a troop of United States cavalry stationed at Fort Grant. Ted's enlistment was for four years and he had now served three years and several months and had been promised a promotion to corporal if he should re-enlist.

When Ted had learned all that Frank seemed able to tell him, the young rough rider told the soldier the story Gladys Decker had told him.

Frank then put his free hand inside his shirt bosom and drew therefrom a tiny gold locket, which hung from a buckskin cord around his neck.

"Here is a little locket," said Frank, "that may be useful as evidence to prove my identity. I have always worn it. Mrs. Makley found it hanging to my neck when she took me from the Indians."

Ted took the locket and opened it. It contained a very small likeness of a beautiful woman's face."

"Your mother, probably," said Ted.

"That is what I have always suspected," replied Frank.

The two boys discussed the matter for a few moments and then Ted said:

"Now that there is no question in my mind as to your true identiy, I am going to turn over to you this packet of papers." Ted took from his pocket the documents purporting to be the will of Forest Decker and other valuable papers relating to Frank's deceased uncle's estate.

"I would examine them," said Ted, as Frank seemed to hesitate.

At Frank's request, Ted opened the packet and found that the papers had not been wrongly labeled. The will was found intact and was worded so as to leave Gladys all the uncle's property, providing the girl's brother was never located. In case the brother was found the property was to be divided equally between the brother and sister. Among the papers was also found a copy of the will of Frank's father. This read much like the uncle's except that the brother was to have two-thirds and the sister one-third. Papers proving the exact values of the estates of the father and of the uncle at the times of their deaths were also in the packet. Nowhere was there

anything to indicate that the uncle was in debt to any man at the time of his death.

Ted had purposely carried on his conversation with Frank within sight and hearing distance of the bound and helpless Hiram Newman.

During the conversation Ted had watched the countenance of the Denver man. He was listening to every word. As the packet of papers was opened and examined Newman's face had assumed a very dejected appearance. He showed plainly that he regarded himself as fully beaten.

Frank happened to look his way while Ted was retying the bundle of papers. The man met Frank's gaze with a look of supplication.

Ted noticed the interchange of glances and said, in a low voice to Frank: "Do you want to talk with the man?"

"Yes," was the answer.

Ted removed the bound man to within a few feet of Frank and withdrew. He wanted the two to talk together undisturbed.

A short time later Ben Tremont notified Ted that Frank wished to see him about something very important.

"I want your advice," said Frank, as Ted approached. "I am so happy on finding my sister and learning my true identity that I feel inclined to be generous. This man has offered to sign a confession of all his acts in trying to get possession of my uncle's estate if we will allow him his liberty. He says he will leave this part of the country and never trouble us again."

"What do you wish to do in the case?" asked Ted.

"If you say the word I will let him write his confession, sign it before witnesses, and let him go," was Frank's answer.

"I think you would be doing right in so doing," replied Ted. "I think this will be a lesson to the man that he will remember the rest of his life, and I do not think he will ever dare to trouble you again."

And so that part of the matter was settled.

It was now getting well on toward dusk, and Ted was anxious to start toward the retreat of the outlaws.

After Newman had written his confession and it had been duly signed and witnessed. Ted asked the man for the directions which had been sent him by Fisher for penetrating the stronghold of the outlaws.

Newman readily produced it.

As Frank's wounded arm would make his services of little use in the raid against the outlaws, it was decided that he should ride back to the fort, there to await the coming of the young rough riders and the young woman, whom he now knew was his sister.

Hiram Newman mounted the black horse and rode away in the direction from which he had come. That was the last that any of the party ever saw of the defeated villain.

Then the young rough riders, with Major Durgy and the soldiers, started back down the canyon with the hope of capturing the band of outlaws under the leadership of Jim Fisher.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE OUTLAWS' STRONGHOLD.

It was dark when Major Durgy and his party reached the opening to the gulch leading into the mountain toward the waterfall, and it was decided to camp at the entrance to the gulch until morning.

After a supper had been cooked and eaten, however, Ted proposed to Bud Morgan and Ben Tremont that they do a little scouting as soon as the moon had risen. It was not certain that the outlaws had not left the gulch, while the soldiers had been up the canyon.

Ted wanted to be sure that the outlaws had not become alarmed and left this stronghold for some other retreat in the mountains.

Accordingly, an hour later the three rough riders started on foot into the gulch.

They proceeded cautiously as far as the waterfall without seeing anything out of the ordinary. Then, with a rifle borrowed from one of the soldiers, ready for immediate action, Ted plunged into the small stream and darted through the waterfall.

He was quickly followed by his companions. They found themselves in inky darkness.

Before starting Ted had read the instructions of how to reach the outlaws' stronghold and knew that himself and companions were now in a sort of cave directly under the stream. He knew that a few rods further into the cave there was a passage leading from it to the right.

This passage penetrated through the mountain and led off from the cave in a diagonal direction.

Feeling the rocky wall to the right, Ted proceeded carefully along and soon came to the opening of this passage.

The passage was not a long one, and it was but a few

ments, although they proceeded very slowly, before Ted discovered a strip of starlit sky ahead.

But outlined against this strip of sky was the silhouette of a human being! The passage was guarded!

Very slowly and noiselessly, Ted crept forward. Now he could hear low voices and knew that more than one sentinel had been placed at the end of the passage.

The young rough rider stopped for a moment and warned his companions to be very cautious about making the least noise.

Then they proceeded forward again, slowly but surely.

The three rough riders were protected by the darkness of the passage. They were certain that they could approach and overcome the sentinels if they could succeed in not making any noise. Ted now knew that there were three outlaws on guard.

Just as Ted had advanced so near to where the sentinels were stationed that he was about to whisper directions to his companions as to the manner in which the attack upon them should be made, one of the outlaws struck a match to light his pipe.

Instantly that part of the passage in which the rough riders were standing was lighted up, and two of the outlaws had seen the intruders!

Ted did not wait an instant now. He had seen that they were discovered.

He gave a quick order to Bud and Ben and leaped forward at the throat of the nearest sentinel.

Ted had well judged the distance, for, as the burned match flickered out, he reached the outlaw and had his fingers pressed against the man's throat.

Within a second he had the outlaw forced to his knees and soon had the man helpless.

Ben Tremont had grabbed the sentinel next to the one Ted had tackled, and, in Ben's powerful hands, the outlaw had little show.

Bud Morgan, however, had missed his man. The outlaw had seen Bud coming and had dodged and started to run toward the camp.

Ted, seeing the situation, dropped the man whom he had rendered helpless for the time being, and started after the man who was running away. Ted overtook the outlaw before he had gone five rods and soon had the man on the ground.

Then ensued a hard struggle. The outlaw was powerfully built and proved to be a worthy adversary for the young rough rider. However, the struggle was very short, for Bud Morgan soon reached the spot and helped Ted to conquer the outlaw.

The precaution was taken to gag, as well as to bind, the three prisoners. Then the men were carried back to the cave behind the waterfall.

When this work had been accomplished Ted spoke to his companions: "Now that we've made a good start, boys, what do you say to going right on and cleaning up the whole business to-night? We have removed the sentinels on guard and it would seem like an easy matter now to surprise the camp and capture the whole bunch."

"Thet's the idee," responded Bud Morgan. "Gee Christmas, this 'ere little tussle we had has got all my fightin' blood ter bilin'. I'd pine right away if we hed ter stop now until we had cleaned up on the whole push."

"I think we had better go right after them now," said Ben.

"Then I'll tell you my plan," said Ted. "One of you fellows stay here with me and keep an eye on the camp while the other goes back down to the canyon and guides Maj. Durgy and his men up here."

"I'll stay with yer," said Bud.

So it was decided. Ben pushed through the waterfall and started back to bring the soldiers, while Ted and Bud re-entered the passage to retrace their steps to the entrance to the outlaws' stronghold.

It was about three-quarters of an hour later that Ben arrived with the soldiers at the waterfall, and he was about to plunge into the brook toward the falling stream, when there was the report of a rifle and the leaden ball passed so close to his cheek that Ben could feel its warmth.

The shot had come from directly beyond the waterfall!

Ben knew that neither Ted nor Bud would have thus fired. It must have come from a rifle in the hands of one of the outlaws.

But where were Ted Strong and Bud Morgan? Could they have been overpowered?

CHAPTER XV.

THE OUTLAWS CAPTURED.

As Ted and Bud surveyed the outlaw camp in the moonlight, from the entrance to the passage leading to the waterfall, they saw that the stronghold was an admirable place for defense under usual conditions.

The camp was in the center of a verdant and pic-

turesque little valley. High mountain walls arose on every side, and, as far as the two rough riders could judge, the passage in front of which they were standing was the only entrance or exit from the valley.

There seemed to be no movements in the camp and Ted believed that the three men, whom himself and companions had overcome, were really the only sentinels on guard.

After waiting a short time Bud Morgan became restless. He did not enjoy being idle. He proposed that Ted and himself creep toward the camp and learn just exactly how the land lay.

Ted's best judgment told him it would be better to wait for the appearance of the soldiers, but, after a few minutes more of waiting, he acceded to Morgan's request.

The two crept forward toward the camp fires. There were two fires and around each, lying in their blankets, the outlaws were sleeping.

Suddenly Bud made a discovery that put a bright idea in his head. Against the trunk of a large tree, near one of the fires, were stacked a pile of rifles. It would seem that all the members of the band had stacked their weapons together.

Bud's plan was to steal these rifles, take them a considerable distance from the camp and hide them in the long grass.

Ted looked over the ground carefully and considered the plan a good one. It looked as if it would be possible to get away with the guns without being discovered. Cautiously they approached the tree, and, dividing the guns between them, soon had taken them quite a distance from the camp, as Bud had suggested.

They then returned toward the camp for the purpose of seeing what else might be accomplished to handicap the outlaws when the final charge should be made upon them, but just at that moment there came a great shout from the entrance to the passage.

Three outlaws were seen rushing toward the camp, yelling to arouse their sleeping companions!

A second later, following the yelling outlaws, Ted saw the form of big Ben Tremont, and, following Ben, came Maj. Durgy and his soldier boys.

In some way the outlaws, whom Ted and Bud had left bound and gagged back of the waterfall, had severed their bonds. Probably one of the men had got loose first and then helped his fellows.

It was one of these men who had fired upon Ben Tremont when he approached the waterfall, followed by the cavalry detail. When the incident was commented upon later, Bud remembered that he had stacked up the rifles belonging to the captured sentinels in one corner of the cave.

The screams of the three outlaws almost immediately awakened every member of Jim Fisher's band.

As they sprang to their feet every man made a rush toward the tree to secure a rifle. In the darkness and confusion none of them seemed to notice Ted and Bud, or if they did not suspect that the two rough riders were not friends.

There was a wild confusion among the outlaws on account of the absence of the rifles.

At an order from the major, the cavalry boys spread out as they ran toward the outlaw camp, and, before the surprised desperadoes rightly understood the situation, the outlaws found themselves entirely surrounded by their enemies.

Without rifles, the outlaw leader saw that he had no hope of escaping.

As the outlaws had gathered close together for better protection, Ted had mingled with them and now found himself right in the center of the bunch. He was standing right by the side of Jim Fisher, the leader of the desperadoes.

Not a shot had so far been fired on either side, but Ted saw Fisher suddenly mount a small stump with a cocked revolver in his hand. Then Fisher yelled:

"I want to tell you cursed soldiers that there is no need of firing on my men. They are willing to surrender. But I also want to say that Jim Fisher will never see the inside of another prison, for I will never be taken alive!"

As he concluded his remark the outlaw chief placed the barrel of his revolver against his own temple and was about to pull the trigger.

At that instant the young rough rider jumped as high as possible in the air to bring him to a level with Fisher's face. While in the air Ted shot out his clinched fist. His fist took Fisher squarely between the eyes.

The revolver exploded, but the bullet went over the outlaw's head. Ted's blow had saved the man's life!

During the excitement among the outlaws on account of Ted's sudden action, Maj. Durgy and the soldiers made a quick attack from all directions.

There was a short, quick, decisive struggle, but no weapons were fired.

In ten minutes the young rough riders and soldiers were victorious. Several of the outlaws were lying upon the ground unconscious from blows made with clubbed rifles and one or two of the soldiers had slight knife wounds. But not a man on either side had been mortally wounded.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

As soon as the outlaws had all been securely bound a search for the money taken from the army paymaster's strong box was begun. It was found that it had already been divided among the men, but it was finally all gathered together.

The next morning Maj. Durgy and the soldiers conducted the prisoners back toward Fort Grant, while Ted, with Bud and Ben, journeyed to Solomonville for the purpose of escorting Gladys Decker to the fort.

They found the girl safe at the home of Ted's friend in Solomonville.

The girl appeared so worried over her affairs and so dejected that Ted felt obliged to give her a little ray of hope, so he told her about finding Hiram Newman in the mountains and about the man having made a written confession of his crimes.

As Ted had surmised, the girl had not told him her name, for the reason that she had read the story in the Denver paper and she was afraid the young rough rider had seen it and would not credit her story.

Two days later the young woman rode to Fort Grant with the rough riders.

Ted thought it best not to suddenly break the news to the girl that Fearless Frank was her long-lost brother.

The young rough rider knew that the girl was sensitive to sudden surprises and emotions, as had been proved several times when she had fainted, and he was afraid the shock would prove too great for her to bear.

So Ted had a long talk with Frank and laid out a program for gradually informing the girl of the great happiness in store for her.

Frank took his position in an adjoining room of Maj. Durgy's residence, to which the girl had been taken on reaching the fort. Then Ted entered the room occupied by Gladys Decker and told the girl he had something to show her.

"What is it?" she asked, interestedly.

Ted placed in her hand the little gold locket which Frank had always worn suspended from his neck.

The girl appeared greatly agitated when she first beheld the locket, and Ted began to suspect that he had not taken the right course, after all.

Then, as the girl pressed the little spring which opened the trinket, she uttered a sudden exclamation of astonishment:

"My mother!"

The girl had seen the face.

Gladys gazed for a moment upon the face of the mother she had never known and then from the bosom of her dress, attached to a tiny gold chain, she, too, drew forth a little locket.

It was similar to the one owned by Frank, but not quite the same.

She opened her locket and handed it to Ted.

It was Ted's turn to be surprised, for he was looking at the likeness of the same face that he had seen in Frank's locket.

The girl looked up with a smile. She did not seem the least bit agitated now.

"So you have found my brother?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Ted, astonished, "but how did you know?"

"I felt instinctively the first time I set eyes on the young man who introduced himself as Frank Makley, that he was my brother," was the girl's reply.

"And you were right!"

It was the voice of Frank himself, and as he ran toward his sister her arms were opened to receive him.

At this moment Ted discreetly left the room.

Thanks to the sagacity of Ted Strong in handling Hiram Newman when he met that man in the canyon, Frank and Gladys Decker had little trouble in securing the property left them by their father and by their uncle.

Maj. Durgy offered to use his influence in getting a discharge for the young soldier from the army, but Frank insisted on serving the few months remaining of his enlistment.

The rough riders visited a few days at the fort, and then made their intended visit to Aaron Miles' famous cattle ranch before leaving the region.

THE END.

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